FRAMING STUDENTS: A STUDY OF INSTITUTIONAL AGENTS AT FOR-PROFIT AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

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Dedication

To Cathy, Bill, and Trevor for showing me what hard work and support look like.

To E and F, my heart and soul.

And to Wyatt, my partner in everything, I love you more than anything.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the daily lives of student services personnel at for-profit and community colleges by inquiring into how they frame the students they work with and whose interests they articulate themselves as serving. Student services personnel are tasked with serving students but must do so within the context and structure in which they work. This research determines whether there are differences between for-profit and community colleges in how student services personnel frame students and whose interests they see themselves serving. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 student services personnel at 2 for-profit colleges and 2 community colleges. Drawing on Stanton-Salazar's (2011) definition of institutional agent and Lipsky's (2010) work on street-level bureaucrats, this research extends the term institutional agent by expanding the definition to include five agent typologies: *student agent, corporate agent, employer agent, disciplinary agent,* and *positional agent*. This dissertation concludes that there are differences in the frequency with which agent typologies in each college sector occur and that the structure of a college and a student services personnel's role within the college have meaning for how personnel frame students and whose interests they articulate serving. In addition, student services personnel act as policy-makers in their interactions with students by determining which students are deserving of their time and effort. At community college one might expect bureaucratic hurdles and time constraints to interfere with how institutional agents serve students, but I also find that institutional agents frame students in a way that allows them to determine when to help students navigate policy "gray area" and when to abide by policy guidelines. Despite the negative attention for problematic practices at for-profit colleges, one might expect the structure of for-profit colleges to closely align with an institutional agent's position in serving students. I find that institutional agents at for-profit colleges often do work with the structure of their college to serve students, but also often shift responsibility for students not succeeding to variables outside of the institution's control.

CHAPTER 1: FRAMING STUDENTS

In 2008, I applied multiple times to different for-profit colleges to work as an admissions representative. At the time, I knew little about for-profit colleges. Students at my high school had applied to traditional state universities or community colleges. I had attended my local state university where I had received a bachelor's degree in history. Even though I had no experience with for-profit colleges, I knew I wanted to work in higher education and those were the jobs that appeared the most on job boards and for which I was qualified. I had worked in insurance sales and the for-profit college admissions teams were looking for people with sales experience, so I thought it would be a good fit. I was finally offered a position at a local branch of a large corporate for-profit college and eagerly accepted. My position was a new admissions position. I was hired to advise and enroll high school students, a population that had not been actively recruited by this college. After several months, I found that I didn't enjoy all of the calls I had to make to potential students and all of the chasing I had to do, but I was still excited each time I enrolled a student. I truly believed I was changing lives for the better, even though the cost of tuition was so high.

At that time, the college was developing a nursing program and I remember thinking how great it would be for recruiting once the program was up and running; potential students were always asking if we had a nursing program. Before the nursing program was launched, I began to doubt the company and doubt the work I was doing. I started to feel uncomfortable with some of the recruiting tactics I was asked to use. Sometimes I felt that I was being pushed to recruit students who I thought would be better served elsewhere. Other recruiting tactics I was asked to use were similar to

common sales tactics where I would focus on a potential student's fears and explain how the college could alleviate those fears. I was exploiting the fears of potential students just to get them to enroll. I would later learn that this was a common recruiting tactic among a number of larger for-profit colleges (Campbell & Deil-Amen, 2012). People did do good work there. Faculty worked endless hours for students who needed extra support, advisors connected students to bus passes and childcare, and even admissions representatives seemed to care about the students they enrolled, but I decided I couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't overlook that I felt like I was taking advantage of students, especially low-income students who could pay less to attend a community college (Deil-Amen, 2014). The recruiting tactics and the type of students we targeted for enrollment presented too much of a moral dilemma. I quit my position with no job prospects. Three months later, I was fortunate enough to get hired as an administrative assistant at a public university where I enrolled in a Master of Public Administration program and eventually I would decide to pursue a Ph.D. in Higher Education.

Years later, while formulating my dissertation proposal, an article was published in a local newspaper entitled, "Nursing students left feeling 'cheated and used." That same nursing program I had been so excited about was being held accountable for questionable teaching practices and so the students were being examined by a third party. As one might presume from the article's title, the students did not fare well and shortly after the nursing program debacle, the campus closed down along with their corporate parent. I experienced a range of emotions: happiness because I had made a decision to stop working at the college; pain for all of the students, past and present, and the turmoil they must have been experiencing; and frustration for the staff and faculty still working

there at the time of closure. Like any engaged doctoral student, I began to ask questions. What would I have done had I still been working at the college at the time the article was published? Did the college staff and faculty know how badly the nursing program and company were being run? If not, why not? How much power did the local staff and faculty actually have at their campus? Thinking back to my brief time at the college, how much agency did I actually have as I was 'helping students to change their lives' and whose interests had I actually been serving? While I determined not to pursue research related to my own experience in admissions or the predatory practices many for-profit colleges have engaged in, I am aware that oftentimes for-profit colleges are painted as caricatures, large corporations preying on and taking advantage of students. There is no doubt that those types of for-profit colleges exist, but in some ways, my research challenges those caricatures by sharing narratives of for-profit college personnel who view themselves as student advocates.

Research has explored college attendance at for-profit colleges through the lens of the student. The marketing and location of these colleges, in combination with the structure of admissions has proven problematic for low-income, minoritized students and students with limited pre-college guidance (Dache-Gerbino, Kiyama, & Sapp, 2018; Holland & DeLuca, 2016). I approached my dissertation research through a lens shaped by my personal experience at a for-profit college, acknowledging the wide-spread problematic practices of for-profit colleges, but also with the knowledge that the research sites who graciously allowed me to explore their campuses and spend time interviewing their staff have substantial differences from that for-profit college I worked at years ago. I worked in admissions, however, my dissertation research does not include participants

from admissions or financial aid. I purposely excluded these roles as they are often the roles featured in press and research related to predatory practices. I also selected for-profit colleges that have not been under the microscope and are not large, publicly-traded institutions known for their aggressive recruiting tactics. The experiences of the participants included in my research are largely different than my own experience working at a for-profit college because of the positions they employ and the unique colleges where they work. I chose to focus on student services personnel and their sense of agency in serving students. My dissertation research was designed to explore how student services personnel view their relationship and sense of obligation to the students on the one hand and to the colleges that employ them on the other.

Introduction

According to national news and multiple government reports, some for-profit colleges engage in predatory recruiting and lending practices and have been cited for providing students with false information so that these institutions can turn a profit (Blumenstyle, 2011; Blumenstyle, 2012; Golden, 2010; Herbert & Hustad, 2013; Kirkham, 2011; Kutz, 2010; United States Congress. Senate Committee on Health et al., 2012). Many for-profit colleges have been framed as diploma mills, credentialing students without adequate assessment. However, research offers a more complex picture. Despite their massive drawbacks as a collective, some occupational colleges, including several for-profit colleges, have developed procedures and policies that enable students to successfully move from admission to graduation, whereas community college procedures and policies often leave students confused and discouraged, which may lead to departure (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2007). Research also suggests that many students'

experiences as they search for a college are much more positive at for-profit colleges than at community colleges (Iloh & Tierney, 2013).

Understanding what happens at these open access colleges is important considering that these public and for-profit institutions have provided access for a large percentage of students who may have otherwise not attended college, with 57% of first-year college-going students attending community colleges (Deil-Amen, 2015) and an additional 15% of first-year students enrolling in for-profit colleges (Deil-Amen, 2015). These two types of institutions also serve a majority of low-income, first generation, and underrepresented minority students attending college (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Carenevale & Strohl, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These institutions serve large numbers of students who have been classified as non-traditional. These are students who have often delayed enrollment into college, have dependents, work full-time, attend part-time, come from families with parents who have not attended college, are from poor and working-class backgrounds, and other characteristics that define them as "non-traditional" (Levin, 2007), yet it is precisely these students who now constitute a majority of undergraduates in the U.S. (Deil-Amen, 2015). Nevertheless, the pre-college experiences and lack of college knowledge among many non-traditional and underrepresented students often creates the need for student services personnel to structure student interactions in a way that clarifies institutional procedures and policies in order to promote student success (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). The types of interactions between student services personnel and students at community colleges and for-profit colleges are important factors in influencing student persistence and graduation.

A key component of a student's experience at any college they attend is the student services personnel they interact with on a regular basis. While for-profit and community colleges generally serve similar populations of students, they have different structures (Bailey & Morest, 2006: Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012; Lechuga, 2010; Tierney & Lechuga, 2012). The sector and the structure of these colleges lead to different contexts in which student services personnel interact with students and carry out their daily work. Understanding and comparing the experiences of student services personnel at for-profit and community colleges can help to clarify what happens when students enroll in these institutions and how student services personnel contribute to student and institutional success or failure.

To understand the experiences of student services personnel, it is important to understand the context and structure of the organizations in which they work. Student services personnel have organizational policy they must communicate and follow in their daily work. For-profit colleges have a different organizational structure than community colleges. The differences go beyond the for-profit college business model that emphasizes profit. Differences include more organizational flexibility, which enable for-profit colleges to easily create and dissolve degree and certificate programs (Lechuga, 2010). For-profit colleges also have an organizational structure that grants more authority to administrators than community college structures do (Lechuga, 2010). In contrast, the community college structure often includes layers of oversite and bureaucracy that make it challenging to make changes. The structural differences of for-profit colleges effect the daily work of student services personnel and influence the way they interact with students.

Student services personnel can be considered "institutional agents" as defined by Stanton-Salazar (2011) as those who control resources and knowledge that are important for student success and are key to creating an environment where students are able to navigate procedural hurdles. Procedures and bureaucratic hurdles, such as those related to financial aid and course planning, can be especially challenging for students who lack college-going knowledge, particularly when institutional procedures are complex and burdensome (Campbell, Deil-Amen, & Rios-Aguilar, 2015; Rosenbaum et al., 2007). Institutional agents can be helpful in assisting students through procedures and bureaucratic hurdles (Bensimon, 2007; Rosenbaum et al., 2007).

Furthermore, resources and budgets are being directed away from traditional areas of staffing such as tenure-track faculty, toward the growing number of institutional agents in the form of managerial professionals. Managerial Professionals are support professionals that engage in professional practices such as conferences and journals but are managed by administration with more structure than faculty (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). By exploring the perceptions of institutional agents and the context in which institutional agents carry out their daily work, we can better understand factors influencing the way institutional agents interact with students and the meaning of these interactions for student experiences and student success or departure. Understanding these factors is especially important for community colleges and for-profit institutions that predominately serve non-traditional students.

The behavior of institutional agents regarding why and how they interact with students is in many ways driven by the norms and expectations of the institution where they work. The way that an institutional agent frames students also influences the nature

of the interactions between students and institutional agent, which can affect a student's ability to be successful in college, especially for students who have struggled with schooling in the past (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). In other words, understanding the way institutional agents frame students enables scholars and practitioners to better understand the intricacies of agent/student interactions, and the types of frames that drive those interactions that may be better linked to student success. The context of an institutional agent's daily work can also affect whose interests are served. While student services personnel positions are supposed to be designed to serve the interests of students, the context of an institutional agent creates conditions for other interests to be served, specifically those of the organization or outside stakeholders. Understanding whose interests are potentially being served by the daily work of institutional agents is important because students often depend on these individuals as a key support in their pathway to college success.

Little research touches on how the context and structure at for-profit and community colleges contribute to the way institutional agents frame students and how institutional agents envision themselves serving the interests of various college stakeholders. Because of the students they serve, understanding how institutional agents approach students and their daily work could potentially help administrators and practitioners focus institutional agents' daily work on practices that contribute to student success. My research explores whose interests institutional agents frame themselves as serving while comparing the experiences of institutional agents at for-profit and community colleges. I explore the process of how institutional agents navigate the complexity of their position by looking at how institutional agents frame students and

whose interests they see themselves serving in their daily work. Such an approach allows me to offer a more thorough understanding and critique of what student services personnel experience and how they operate on a daily basis and how that can be problematic for serving the interests of students and student success.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011), student services personnel who interact with students on a daily basis at for-profit and community colleges, perform their job duties within the specific context and structure of the sector in which they work. For-profit and community colleges generally serve similar populations of students but have different structures (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Deming et al., 2012; Lechuga, 2010; Tierney & Lechuga, 2012). The sector and the structure of these colleges create two distinctly different contexts in which institutional agents interact with students and carry out their daily work. Different contexts could lead for-profit and community college institutional agents to frame their students differently. An institutional agent's framing of students, or the way an institutional agent views a student, affects the resources, information, and opportunities they provide to students (Bensimon, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 2011) The way an institutional agent views student motivation or a student's desired outcome for attending college can influence what institutional agents think they and the college can or should do to promote student success. The context in which institutional agents perform their job duties can also affect whose interests are served. Student services personnel are charged with serving the interests of students, but it is possible that the structure of the sector in which they work creates circumstances for other interests to be served, such as those of the organization or outside stakeholders. It is also possible that the other interests student services personnel are serving are not compatible with the interests of the student. It is important to explore whose interests institutional agents describe themselves as serving through their daily work because they are presumed to firstly promote the success of the students attending their college.

Much research has explored the role of institutional agents on various student outcomes. The impact of advising on student retention, graduation, aspirations, and engagement has been explored in-depth with results ranging from advising interactions as potentially harmful (Clark, 1960) to interventions as successful (Bahr, 2008; Bai & Pan, 2009; Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Metzner, 1989). Several researchers have explored types of institutional agents at for-profit colleges. Kinser (2006b) explores the role of student affairs personnel at for-profit colleges, discovering that students are often framed as customers. Researchers that have compared for-profit and community colleges have explored student college choice (Iloh & Tierney, 2014), student access to college information (Iloh & Tierney, 2013), and the structure and experience of attending these different types of institutions (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). In their research, Davidson (2016) describes the transition experience of student affairs professionals who moved from non-profit colleges to for-profit colleges. Davidson determines that some student affairs professionals found little difference in their work between sectors and others were not able to easily transition. However, few researchers have explored the difference in staff experience at for-profit and community colleges.

Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person (2007) compare the experiences of students at community colleges and occupational colleges, which include for-profit colleges. Among their findings is the insight that the structure and procedures at the occupational colleges are beneficial for student success. There is very little research comparing the differences in the way that the context at for-profit and community colleges influences how institutional agents frame students and how agents craft their daily work to serve the interests of various college stakeholders. Because of the students they serve and their

impact on education, it is imperative to understand the experiences and daily work of student services personnel at both for-profit and community colleges. An understanding of student services personnel acting as institutional agents could potentially help administrators and practitioners craft a context where agent interactions with students predominately contribute to student interests and student success.

The Structure of For-Profit and Community Colleges

Community colleges, public 2-year colleges, are typically open-access institutions serving a diverse student population (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). For-profit colleges are also typically open-access institutions serving a diverse student population (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Deming et al., 2012; Lechuga, 2010; Tierney & Lechuga, 2012). However, for-profit colleges have a number of structural differences compared to public 2-year colleges. Some of the differences that potentially affect the daily work of employees at these institutions include mission, decision-making authority, relationships with local employers, target market, flexibility in program development, revenue streams, and guidelines for expenditures and profits. Private non-profit 2-year colleges, which differ from community colleges in that they are not publicly funded institutions and from for-profit colleges in that they have non-profit status, are not included in this research. Private non-profit 2-year colleges are fewer in number and have not been problematized to the extend that for-profit and community colleges have.

Before discussing structural differences between for-profit and community colleges, it is important to note that both community colleges and for-profit colleges are heterogenous within their distinct categories. Community colleges are not homogeneous

institutions, and the range of differences among community colleges include aspects from location to the scope of student outcomes to the way student outcomes are achieved (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Levin & Kater, 2012; Shaw & London, 2001). Though they are often grouped together, for-profit colleges are heterogeneous in structure and design, ranging from sole proprietor to large publicly traded colleges. Often it is large, national, shareholder for-profit colleges, such as University of Phoenix, that are associated with the label for-profit college and receive the most media coverage (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012; Kinser, 2006c). However, depending solely on University of Phoenix and colleges like this giant to explore the experiences of students, staff, and faculty at for-profit colleges can be problematic. Differences including the size, wealth and market value, and even the structure of large publicly traded for-profit colleges are unusual compared to other regional or neighborhood for-profit colleges (Kinser, 2006a; Kinser, 2006c).

Despite some major differences, there are structural similarities among many for-profit colleges just as there are similarities among community colleges. Community colleges often have multiple missions, such as transfer, vocational training, and community education (Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2001; Hentschke, 2010; Kelsay & Oudenhoven, 2014). For-profit colleges are often predominately composed of programs designed to train students for placement in the labor market with no liberal arts related degree programs (Deming et al., 2012; Kinser, 2006a). For-profit colleges focus on a singular mission, to provide students with a particular skill set linked with career training (Bailey et al., 2001; Hentschke, 2010; Kelsay & Oudenhoven, 2014).

Community colleges have, at times, been treated as a cure-all for a number of educational and social issues (Levin & Kater, 2012). This makes the target market for

community colleges diverse and the students attending expect to achieve a wide variety of outcomes (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Levin & Kater, 2012). For-profit colleges typically focus on a niche market, sometimes expanding and transforming, but more likely in response to the labor market or enrollment growth rather than as a solution for societal challenges. In addition, for-profit colleges focus on the employer as their market rather than the student, which is a shift from the student market focus of public institutions (Hentschke, 2010).

For-profit colleges also often have stronger connections with employers than many community college programs because they are closely tied to the labor market (Hentschke, 2010). These connections are often maintained by the institutional actors representing individual occupational programs (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2004; Rosenbaum et al., 2007). To build connections with local employers, for-profit colleges often rely on charter-building (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2004). In the charter-building model, private vocational colleges, including for-profit colleges, rely on relationships built with employers in order to validate their authority as evaluators of graduates. Colleges who participate in the "charter-building" model are not able to rely on traditional accreditation to validate their authority as degree-granting institutions the same way community colleges do. By building relationships and trust with employers, private vocational colleges attempt to provide career placement for their graduates, thereby validating the college's status as an educator (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2004).

For-profit colleges often have an organizational flexibility not found in community colleges. For-profit colleges, compared to community colleges, are more easily able to create or dissolve degree and certificate programs as the local economy in

which the for-profit college is located changes. This flexibility is due to the for-profit college governance structure and authority granted to administrators at these institutions (Lechuga, 2010). In contrast, community colleges often rely on a shared governance model which gives faculty a voice in decision-making. The authority granted to administrators in the top-down approach at for-profit colleges influences issues of institutional governance, institutional policies, and even classroom management and curriculum. Administrators are given most of the control in areas where community college faculty typically have decision-making and implementation power (Bailey et al., 2001; Lechuga, 2010).

For-profit colleges depend heavily on student tuition, which often comes in the form of government grants and loans (Kinser, 2006a). Unlike public colleges, such as community colleges, for-profit colleges do not have access to tax revenue. Public colleges are designated as 501(c)(3) organizations, meaning college revenue cannot benefit shareholders. The same is not true for for-profit colleges (Kinser, 2006a). The ability for shareholders to benefit from revenue has created much debate about whose interests are being served by the programs and activities at for-profit colleges (Deming et al., 2012; United States Congress. Senate Committee on Health et al., 2012). These structural differences have meaning for student services personnel at for-profit colleges because they create the context that shapes how personnel interact with students.

Community colleges have been critiqued for diverting students from equitable outcomes and creating bureaucratic procedures that prevent students from being able to effectively navigate college (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Rosenbaum et al., 2007). For-profit colleges have been critiqued for a variety of reasons and are undoubtedly problematic.

The many critiques of these institutions include discussions about the implications of a profit-motive in the educational sector. Profit-motives have driven large corporate for-profit colleges to develop practices that take advantage of students who lack college-going knowledge during recruitment and make promises to low-income students about career outcomes that may or may not be achievable (Kutz, 2010; United States Congress. Senate Committee on Health et al., 2012). The aggressive tactics of admissions staff and illegal altering of student's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by financial aid staff at several large corporate for-profit colleges have been scrutinized in the press and by the federal government (Blumenstyle, 2011; Blumenstyle, 2012; Golden, 2010; Herbert & Hustad, 2013; Kirkham, 2011; Kutz, 2010; United States Congress. Senate Committee on Health et al., 2012). Critics of for-profit colleges have highlighted the debt burden of both graduates and students that are unable to finish their degree/certificate programs at for-profit colleges. Students attending for-profit colleges are more likely to default on loans (Hillman, 2014) and trends in data show that federal regulation can assist in the decrease of default rates by preventing colleges that do not meet particular performance measurements from accessing federal loan dollars (Jaquette & Hillman, 2015). In addition, the closure of for-profit college campuses and corporations, such as Corinthians Colleges Inc. and ITT Technical Institute, have left students in a lurch, sometimes with student loan debt and nowhere to finish their degree (Puzzanghera & White, 2016). However, some for-profit colleges also have implemented practices that are designed to draw and then retain students who may have different needs than traditional students (Kinser, 2006b; Rosenbaum et al., 2007).

Students at For-Profit and Community Colleges

For-profit and community colleges serve a large and diverse range of students. These colleges enroll a large percentage of underrepresented minority students (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Multiple studies have explored why certain minority groups tend to enroll in for-profit and community colleges. Interactions of socioeconomic status, academic preparation, and policy play a role in the large numbers of minority students enrolling in these institutions. However, race continues to play a role in student college choice (Dache-Gerbino et al., 2018; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; Kurlaender, 2006), increasing the percentage of underrepresented ethnic minority students enrolling in for-profit and community colleges.

For-profit and community colleges serve large numbers of students that have been classified as non-traditional. The traits most often associated with non-traditional students include students who have delayed enrollment into college, have dependents, work full-time, attend part-time, come from a working-class background, and other characteristics that place students outside of the constructed norm of the traditional college student (Levin, 2007). Despite that students with these traits have been labeled "non-traditional," they are now the numerical norm of students enrolling in college (Deil-Amen, 2015). Because the type and number of traits that define non-traditional students vary, students' needs related to student success also vary. Depending on a student's needs, previous experience, and personal goals, different strategies can be more or less effective in helping students succeed (Folsom, Yoder, & Joslin, 2015).

Students at for-profit and community colleges often have conflicting demands on their time and struggle to balance college and other external priorities (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). Rosenbaum et. al. (2007) found that in community colleges students are expected

to take the initiative to help themselves. In contrast, occupational colleges (this includes for-profit and private non-profit 2-year colleges) operate in such a way that the institution takes the initiative to address the information deficits and lack of cultural know-how related to college-going that their students struggle with upon enrollment. Occupational colleges don't make assumptions about what college-going information, knowledge, and skills their students have. Instead, occupational colleges structure institutional procedures and policies so that students don't have confusing choices, have access to and mandatory meetings with designated advisors, and experience limited bureaucratic hurdles. Kinser (2006b) made similar discoveries related to the structure of services offered to students when looking at student affairs professionals at for-profit colleges.

Student Services Personnel as Advisors at For-Profit and Community Colleges

The institutional agents in student services roles that are the focus of my dissertation research have job duties and daily work that fall into the broad spectrum of advising and advising practices. Advising has become an essential piece of undergraduate education in both for-profit and community colleges. However, advising is not narrowly defined and can appear in various forms such as faculty advising, career counseling, major academic advising, and programmatic advising. In different institutions, different positions may play a major role in student advising. For example, for-profit colleges often have career services specialists who interact with students in an advising capacity on a regular basis, whereas licensed counselors and professional academic advisors are more prevalent at community colleges. In addition, for more specialized vocational programs or medical programs, the role of program coordinator or program director may be more closely connected with advising students. This research focuses on advising by

individuals who work in student services and student affairs and excludes faculty advising and personnel who work in admissions and financial aid. The fundamental role that advisors play in educational institutions ranges from positively affecting student graduation outcomes to stepping in as advocate on behalf of an individual student.

Advising plays a role in retention and graduation and can have a positive effect on student success. Though research on the impact of advising has produced mixed results, much research has concluded that advising has both direct and indirect effects on student retention (Bai & Pan, 2009; King, 1993; Kot, 2014; Metzner, 1989). Early research of advising practices concluded that high quality advising had a positive effect on freshman year retention at a public university (Metzner, 1989). Metzner (1989) determined that for her sample of students, even low-quality advising was better than no advising for attrition rates. Certain advising practices are more highly correlated with student persistence, transfer from a two-year college to a four-year college, and graduation than other advising practices (Bahr, 2008; Bai & Pan, 2009; Bailey & Morest, 2006; Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Metzner, 1989). Advisors are often a key institutional representative for students and have the opportunity to help students identify challenges that could lead to departure (King, 1993; Kot 2014).

Advisors play a role in the development of student aspirations. In early research, Clark (1960) determined that institutional agents serving students in community colleges can play a role in "cooling out" students. Cooling out is when a student attending a community college is influenced by organizational policies and structures as well as institutional agents to rethink their educational path, moving from more ambitious transfer programs to certificate and vocational programs (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark,

1960). Central to Clark's (1960) contribution is the role that the organization and the system of higher education play in processes like "cooling out." Clark found that the junior college selected for his case study faced numerous external and internal pressures to manage student aspirations. Because students entered the junior college with aspirations that they were not able to attain due to a number of factors, junior college counselor roles were designed to work within the procedures put in place by the college to cool students out. Clark's finding that the structure of the organization and the system of higher education influenced the role of the counselor and counselor/student interactions for particular students is important for understanding the role of advisors.

The influence of an institutional agent's role in student aspirations is still often examined in research. More recent research that has explored the role of advising in the aspirations of academically underprepared students has not found evidence of advisors "cooling out" students. At times, advising could be more beneficial for academically underprepared students than students who begin community college academically prepared (Bahr, 2008). Other research has determined different factors, such as credit accumulation, financial aid, and establishing a career, interfere with student aspirations and transfer students attaining a bachelor's degree (Broton, 2019; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015; Uno, Mortimer, Kim, & Vuolo, 2010) and impede on the success of students at community colleges (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). This more recent research moves away from focusing on institutional agents as the cause of "cooling out." Other research has found that community colleges may actually play a "warming up" role, where student aspirations are heightened as a result of their community college attendance (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Rosenbaum et al., 2007).

Advisors play a role in helping students learn to navigate the institution. In King's (1993) review of academic advisors and retention, they catalog the different roles that advisors play in a student's college experience. The inventory of possible roles includes guiding students to appropriate support services, familiarizing students with campus resources, assisting students with course selections, and helping students navigate any bureaucratic hurdles to transfer (King, 1993). Guidebooks for advisors have included these types of roles as suggestions for advisor development (Folsom et al., 2015). Institutional agents at for-profit and community colleges must often frame their interactions with students in a way that clarifies institutional procedures and policies in order to promote student success because these students often lack important information necessary for navigating college (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). In their study, Rosenbaum et al. (2007) address the differences in policy and procedures at occupational and community colleges. At occupational colleges, the increased administrative authority and program flexibly allow the colleges to meet the needs of students in several ways. For instance, mandatory advising ensures students meet with their advisor at least during critical decision-making periods, such as course registration. Mandatory advising allows students to receive guidance from a designated counselor, limits student mistakes, and helps advisors catch student mistakes early on.

Advisors play a role in student engagement. In some instances, advisors represent one of the only opportunities for students to connect with an institutional representative who is focused on the student's college experience. Advisors have the opportunity to assist students with connecting coursework to life experiences, major and career exploration for students experiencing uncertainty, transitioning into college and

navigation of college procedures, and connection to resources for underprepared students and students experiencing academic or social challenges (Folsom et al., 2015; King, 1993). Non-traditional students often live and work off campus creating challenges for traditional means of student engagement (Deil-Amen, 2011; Levin, 2007). In her study of community college students, Deil-Amen (2011) finds that when institutional agents, such as faculty/instructors, focus on integrating social and academic dimensions of the college experience, students become more engaged. Student engagement is an important factor in student persistence (Tinto, 1987). Deil-Amen (2011) also finds that small hurdles can potentially derail these students but that institutional agents can intervene and assist students by helping them work through bureaucratic processes. In other words, because there is a concentration of students at for-profit and community colleges who are non-traditional, the types of interactions between institutional agents and students at these colleges are an important factor in influencing student persistence and graduation.

Academic research has only touched briefly on the role of advisors/institutional agents in for-profit colleges (Davidson, 2016; Kinser, 2006b; Lechuga, 2010; Rosenbaum et al., 2007; Tierney & Lechuga, 2012). The absence of academic research is partly due to the restrictions many for-profit colleges put on their staff and faculty regarding sharing information with outsiders (Tierney & Lechuga, 2012). These restrictions make it challenging to explore the experiences of institutional agents at for-profit colleges and as a result, the voices and lived experiences of institutional agents are often missing in research focused on for-profit colleges. However, in one of the few studies to explore student affairs professionals at for-profit colleges, Kinser (2006b) finds that student affairs professionals use the guiding principle "students are customers" when interacting

with students. This is a rare insight into how institutional agents at for-profit colleges frame the students they work with. However, Kinser's interview participants were senior administrators, not on-the-ground employees tasked with advising students in some capacity on a daily basis. My dissertation research contributes to the small body of work exploring institutional agents at for-profit colleges by directly comparing for-profit colleges to community colleges. In addition, my dissertation research contributes by adding an exploration of whose interests institutional agents frame themselves as serving in their daily work.

Conceptual Framework

I explore the daily lives of student services personnel at for-profit and community colleges using Stanton-Salazar's (2011) definition of an institutional agent and Lipky's (2010) framing of street-level bureaucrats. I also use Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person's (2007) comparison of occupational and community colleges to explore the way institutional agents frames the students they serve. I use Stanton-Salazar's definition of institutional agents to guide my understanding of how student services personnel can work to serve the interest of students. I will then introduce Lipsky's work on street-level bureaucrats to highlight important structural elements of an organization that influence how institutional agents serve students. Lipsky's research helps to frame the daily experience of institutional agents by addressing the complexity of their positions as mediators between the organizational policies and individual student needs and desires. It is important to explore the experiences of institutional agents because they are presumed to serve the interests of students, in particular, the low-income, first-generation, and minority students attending for-profit and community colleges. However, the complex

nature of student services personnel work and the organizations in which they carry out their work may influence how institutional agents frame students and whose interests they are actually serving.

Rosenbaum et al. (2007) compare the structures and procedures of occupational and community colleges. Findings include that occupational colleges structure a student's college experience with the assumption that they may lack the college-going knowledge necessary to navigate the number of choices students must make in order to successfully complete college. In addition, students do not enter college with the soft skills necessary to succeed in the employment market. Occupational colleges build in structures and procedures that allow students to navigate the institution, such as mandatory advising and limited choices in course options, as well as the opportunity for students to develop soft skills alongside technical skills as they attend college. Furthermore, occupational colleges work to connect to local employers and have active career services staff who are involved in student's post-graduation employment preparation and job search. I use this research to explore how institutional agents frame the students they serve and their expectations about students and what students need in order to be successful in college.

Stanton-Salazar defines institutional agents as people in positions of authority that interact with students and have connections to and control of resources and knowledge related to a particular institution (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Stanton-Salazar's (2011) network analytic framework, where he defines the term institutional agent, examines the role of key institutional agents in student development at the secondary education level. These institutional agents assist with the socialization process, helping students learn how to navigate the bureaucratic processes and the discourse needed to succeed in school.

Institutional agents have the ability to act as gatekeepers to low-income and minority students by acting as barriers to valuable resources, information, and networks. However, institutional agents also have the ability to share with students the organizational networks and social norms that can assist students, guiding them through the processes that lead to successful student outcomes (Bensimon, 2007). Institutional agents are able to play such a crucial role in student success because of their hierarchical position within an institution where they have access to important resources and occupy positions of power (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Lack of adequate access to institutional agents can hinder college-going for students. In their research on students who are still exploring careers but are already enrolled in specific career programs at for-profit colleges, Holland and DeLuca (2016) note that student's perceived lack of career counseling in high school put students at a disadvantage upon entering for-profit colleges. In addition, the way in which an institutional agent can play a crucial role in student success has been explored in Holland's (2015) research. Holland (2015) examines the role of trust in the institutional agent/student relationship of high school counselors and briefly touches on the complexity of acting as an institutional agent. Holland explores the experiences of 22 high school counselors and 89 students through observations and interviews, focusing on the counselor/student relationship in the college application process. Holland describes some of the dynamics for one of the counselors, who stood out for having built trusting relationships with students and supporting student aspirations, but struggled with some of the more bureaucratic processes of the position. Holland (2015) demonstrates that for

some institutional agents, institutional context leads them to work around policy and outside of institutional norms to be what they believe is effective in their position

Through Holland's (2015) research, my own professional experience working in a for-profit college and as an academic advisor, and the findings from my pilot study, I ascertain that the role an institutional agent plays in serving students is more complicated than connecting a student to necessary resources, information, and opportunities. Institutional agents not only attempt to serve the interests of the student, but also must serve the interests of the organization for which they work. In my professional role as staff at a for-profit college and through my pilot study, I distinguished that serving the interests of both students and the institution are not always incompatible or isolated from each other, but can be more complicated and dynamic. For example, in my pilot study, institutional agents at a for-profit college framed students as a direct extension of the college. They expressed that a student's behavior in the work-place post-graduation was a representation of the college and could impact whether or not employers hired students from the college in the future. Students were framed not just as students, but as future workers/employees. While institutional agents felt that they prioritized students, they also had to think about the future of the college and future students, which sometimes made it difficult to prioritize the needs of one individual student. In other words, institutional agents had to frame students not only in terms of their direct relationship with the student, but they also had to frame the impact of their actions and interactions with students in terms of organizational constraints and accountability.

Both Stanton-Salazar (2011) and Holland (2015) explore the institutional agent/student relationship in high school. I apply their understanding of institutional

agents to student services personnel at for-profit and community colleges. However, Stanton-Salazar (2011) focuses on agents either acting as gatekeepers or providing resources to students and acting as a conduit for student success. Stakeholders, the organization, and institutional constraints and accountability, while acknowledged, are not explored in-depth as key to an institutional agent's experience, yet, these elements can have a direct impact on the way that institutional agents serve students in their daily work and student interactions. Stanton-Salazar does not provide specifics or discuss how particular organizational context might impact an institutional agent's ability to do their job. The institution is portrayed as neutral, without a large impact on the decisions and actions of institutional agents. The way that institutional agents navigate the hurdles and complexities of their position has been explored very little in the higher education literature. I contend that perhaps the organization is not neutral but instead may limit the agency of institutional agents as they work to serve students by regulating what they can and cannot do and determining the availability of the time, resources, and array of actions an institutional agent can take when assisting students.

To address the hurdles and complexities student services personnel experience in their work environment, I introduce Michael Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats. Street-level bureaucrats are on-the-ground employees doing the work of an organization. Street-level bureaucrats encompass institutional agents who are doing the work of their organization through their interactions and service to students. Lipsky directly addresses the environment of street-level bureaucrats by illuminating structure, context, and constraints that directly affect how street-level bureaucrats interact with and serve their clientele. Lipsky introduces resource availability, workload, and accountability to

numerous and diverse stakeholders. Inclusion of these elements is important because they help determine what an institutional agent can and cannot do and how an institutional agent must function on a daily basis due to the limitations of their position. These elements also influence whose interests are being served and how those interests are being served. Holland's (2015) institutional agents demonstrate the complexity of managing contextual elements like workload and accountability. Holland's counselor who stood out above the rest, especially when it came to making trusting connections with minority students and nurturing student aspirations, struggled with efficiently managing her caseload and administrative paperwork. The context and constraints of the organization influenced how counselors could serve their students.

In addition to introducing important organizational context, Lipsky (2010) also explores components of a street-level bureaucrat's daily work. One of these components is the discretion a street-level bureaucrat has in their interactions. Discretion is a fundamental part of a street-level bureaucrat's position (Lipsky, 2010). Street-level bureaucrats serve clientele through private/unmonitored interactions. Whether consciously or not, they serve interests of the clientele, or might direct clientele in a particular way or withhold/provide information in order to serve the interests of the organization during unmonitored client interactions. For example, an institutional agent may provide a student with information about a policy loophole during their interaction and this best serves the interests of the student. These discrete interactions where student or organizational interests may be served are challenging to monitor or track. Street-level bureaucrats have the freedom to interact how they see fit when meeting with clientele one-on-one or when engaging in activities where supervision and meaningful

accountability measures are difficult to enforce. The discretion embedded in a street-level bureaucrats position allows them to act as policy-makers when they see fit through their unmonitored interactions with clientele that are challenging to manage and track. Understanding how discretion plays into the daily work of institutional agents is important because agents can use discretion in their interactions to decide who has access to particular information and resources.

Although challenging to do, discretion can be circumscribed in certain ways, i.e. monitoring and managerial control (Lipsky, 2010). Lipksy describes how managers and administration can work to minimize the discretion street-level bureaucrats have in client interactions through incentives and sanctions. Incentives and sanctions can potentially lead street-level bureaucrats to focus on meeting managerial or administrative measures as opposed to serving individual clients. However, when the interests of street-level bureaucrats differ from managers and administration, sanctions and incentives may not be powerful enough to minimize the discretion exercised by street-level bureaucrats. Institutional agents at colleges have been found to use discretion in interactions to serve various interests from the recruitment process (Luca, 2010) to cooling out/warming up students (Clark, 1960; Rosenbaum et al., 2007). In their study of admissions at several California State Universities, Luca (2010) finds that some admissions representatives continued to work according to their view of "their role as facilitating access to higher education," (Luca, 2010, p. 192) despite changes in administrative enrollment management practices. Street-level bureaucrats can use the discretion afforded in one-on-one interactions with clientele to work against or in-spite of organizational policy

Lipsky (2010) explores additional behaviors, beyond the use of discretion, that are influenced by the limitations of a street-level bureaucrat's position. Lipsky provides a lens for viewing how institutional agents function when due to constraints, they are not able to serve their clientele the way they had imagined when they were hired into their position. For example, a teacher may enter the field of education imagining they will serve each student as an individual, but must abandon that ideal because they need to manage a large classroom full of students (Lipsky, 2010). Limitations on street-level bureaucrats, such as a shortage of resources and processing of large numbers of clientele, can drive various coping behaviors. Constraints like mass processing can lead to behaviors such as favoritism. Street-level bureaucrats may realize that they cannot serve all clients equally and in turn concentrate more time and effort to a few select clients.

Lipsky (2010) also illuminates how street-level bureaucrats can justify certain outcomes that maybe contradictory to their goals or values, especially when their daily work is different than how they had imagined the position. Street-level bureaucrats can use assumptions about how clients ended up in their particular situation as tools to disconnect from clients, allowing street-level bureaucrats to feel as though they are serving clientele to the best of their ability. Blaming clientele is justification that allows street-level bureaucrats to be relieved of responsibility when client outcomes are negative. Lipsky (2010) acknowledges that individual and environmental context make a difference in a client's success, however, assumptions can be used in lieu of recognizing organizational or institutional agent shortcomings and instead push all blame to the client. In other words, street-level bureaucrats may frame clients negatively when they aren't able to be effective in helping clientele due to organizational constraints. Circumscribed

discretion, mass processing of clients, a shortage of resources, and assumptions that allow institutional agents to operate regardless of organizational shortcomings are examples of institutional structure and context influencing how an institutional agent interacts with students and whose interests are being served during those interactions.

I apply Lipsky's research on street-level bureaucrats to institutional agents in order to explore how they navigate the hurdles and complexities of their position, especially when their job is more complicated than just serving the interests of their students. Stanton-Salazar's (2011) definition of institutional agents can be used to shape what the process looks like when institutional actors work in the interests of their student population. Using a lens that includes both Stanton-Salazar's (2011) institutional agents and Lipsky's (2010) framing of street-level bureaucrats acknowledges the individual agency of institutional actors to connect students to resources and information. This dual lens also focuses on the constrained context of working in institutions where limited resources and a highly regulated environment effect how institutional agents interact with clientele (students), work to serve various interests, view their daily work, and interpret the path to success or potential for success for those they are tasked with serving. Both frameworks allow me to explore whose interests institutional agents frame themselves as serving and how institutional agents operate within the context of their work environment.

This study is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the context in which institutional agents at for-profit colleges draw their assumptions and operate on a daily basis, and whether this is different from institutional agents working at community colleges. While other studies have explored the perspectives of institutional agents as a

small piece of a larger research agenda, this study will focus solely on the perspectives of institutional agents, the way they frame the students they interact with, and include in-depth explorations of their voices and lived experiences. Institutional structure is important and certain types of structure and procedures, such as mandatory advising and consistent class scheduling, are beneficial for student success (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). Attention will be paid to the institution itself, which will not be treated as neutral or standardized, but will be acknowledged as dynamic and influential on the daily work of institutional agents, specifically by looking at for-profit colleges. The corporate structure at many for-profit colleges, with an emphasis on top-down management and focus on the local labor-market, may actually have a more complicated sense of whose interests are being served. By comparing for-profit and community colleges and acknowledging the institution as a dynamic setting that sets the space for institutional agents to serve students, I explore whether the interactions of institutional agents in community colleges are more nuanced than previously thought as well. I determine how institutional agents operate in different contexts and what their daily work is actually about.

The relationship that an institutional agent has with students and the interaction of that relationship with organizational constraints has not been explored through the lens of the institutional agent. This lens includes examining the complexity of their daily work, such as serving various interests and juggling the needs of multiple stakeholders that influence an institutional agent's access to resources and ability to perform their job. Given such contexts, the present study addresses these dynamics with a focus on how institutional agents within these differing institutional structures routinely interact with students. Do these institutional agents act as agents on behalf of the student or on behalf

the institution? In what ways do they help students exert agency to succeed in navigating through college and in what ways do they act as agents tasked with simply exerting institutional structures, leaving students more informed yet still on their own to navigate? Are certain patterns relevant to this dynamic more or less prevalent at community colleges? Exploring how institutional agents frame students and whose interests they are serving is important because of the students enrolling at for-profit and community college, many of whom are low-income, first generation, and minority students (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Deming et al., 2012; Lechuga, 2010; Tierney & Lechuga, 2012). If institutional agents are serving the interest of the institution at the expense of student interests, it could disproportionally impact students who lack college-going knowledge and rely on institutional agents to navigate college bureaucracy. It is important to understand the on-the-ground interactions that influence the experience of these students.

I expected to find that the process of how institutional agents navigate serving the interests of students and the interests of the institution is dynamic and nuanced. The top-down management and focus on the local labor-market found in for-profit colleges could complicate whose interests are being served. However, I expected to find that the structure of student interactions at for-profit colleges, such as mandatory advising and fixed classes schedules (Rosenbaum et al., 2007), create an environment where serving the interests of the students and interests of the institution are not incompatible, such as scholars have demonstrated happens in community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994) and can at times, complement each other. I also expected that student services personnel at for-profit colleges would view students as a customer (Kinser,

2006b) and because of that, along with a structure designed to assist students who lack college-going knowledge and soft skills related to the labor market (Rosenbaum et al., 2007), would not place onus on the student for success. Based on my pilot study and knowledge of the structure of procedures and enrollment at community colleges (Rosenbaum et al., 2007) I expected to find that institutional agents at community colleges are more likely to frame students in a way that places full onus on the student for success, removing responsibility from the institution when students are not successful. Like Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats, I expected institutional agents at for-profit and community colleges to use the discretion embedded in their position to act as policy-makers by serving various interests based on how they framed the students they are tasked with serving.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This study focuses on student services personnel who encompass Stanton-Salazar's (2011) definition of institutional agents: people in positions of authority that interact with students and have connections to and control of resources and knowledge related to a particular institution. I will explore the process of how institutional agents navigate the complexity of their position and organizational context by examining whose interests institutional agents frame themselves as serving and how they justify their actions to serve those interests using the following research questions:

1. How do institutional agents frame the students they serve?
    - How does this framing influence how institutional agents view student success?
    - How does the institution's context and structure influence institutional agent's framing and view of student success?
2. How do institutional agents in for-profit and community colleges articulate whose interests they are serving?
    - How do institutional agents manage the challenges they face when serving various interests?
    - What are the dynamics of how institutional agents respond to competing interests?
3. How does the institution's context and structure constrain or enable agency and discretion?
    - How do institutional agents perceive their institution's structure influencing their daily work?

- How do institutional agents challenge the structure in which they work?

This study employed a qualitative research design, which includes the following aspects: data collection in a naturalistic setting, researcher as the instrument for data collection, and a design that explores the context of a phenomenon or process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). In addition, process and meaning are the main foci of qualitative research, rather than outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). Qualitative research is also descriptive, and data collection occurs with the belief that minute, taken for granted details in a setting or an interaction could be important for understanding context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). Research questions for this study explore the context and lived-experiences of institutional agents as well as the process of how they navigate the various interests of stakeholders. Because context and process are the focus of this study, and the lived experience of navigating various interests is expected to be complicated and nuanced, qualitative research is the most appropriate method (Creswell, 2014).

Interviewing is best for exploring and understanding individual stories, lived experiences, and meaning-making (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, interviewing is best to study institutional agents, their student perceptions based on the institutional agent's individual contexts, and their process of navigating complex and various interests. The most appropriate approach to understanding context, lived experiences, and meaning-making is the three-interview process in phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2006). However, after testing the three-interview process in the pilot study and discovering feasibility issues due to time constraints of institutional agents at for-profit colleges, interviews were condensed into one interview. Each interview was designed to explore the participant's context by inquiring into the details of their present, professional

lived experience, specifically their interactions with students, and the meaning participants make of these experiences (Seidman, 2006). Interviews were also designed to elicit stories and specific examples from participants. This design element was to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences, explore meaning-making, and include stories that participants found important enough to share (Seidman, 2006).

To draw additional inferences about the participants' perspectives, the study incorporated observations during site visits (Maxwell, 2012). Research also included analyzing documents such as student codes of conduct, college catalogues, and college websites. These data collection methods were incorporated to assist with triangulation and support conclusions drawn from findings. Because one short interview leaves much of the participant's context unexplored, document analysis and observations are particularly important to understand a participant's context better. As a result, document analysis and observations informed different aspects of the daily work of institutional agents not acquired from interviews (Maxwell, 2012).

Site Selection

The institutions included in the study were two community colleges and two for-profit colleges located in the western United States. These specific types of colleges were selected purposefully based on Maxwell's (2012) suggestion to select sites that would offer an opportunity to compare for-profit and community college structures. Furthermore, they were chosen to explore the similarities and differences between institutional agents at for-profit and community colleges. All locations were selected based on degree offerings, college structure, location, and access to site/participants.

For-profit colleges were selected based on for-profit college classifications introduced by Kinser (2006a). The for-profit colleges selected are not representative of the spectrum of institutions in the for-profit college category but instead have specific attributes. The first element in Kinser's (2006a) classification is location. The for-profit colleges selected were not large national chains spread across the U.S., nor were they single location colleges. Instead, they had a regional (Kinser, 2006a) presence with multiple locations in the western U.S. One of the for-profit colleges has recently started expanding to other locations within the U.S. but still does not have the same national presence as many large publicly traded for-profit colleges.

The next element of classification is ownership (Kinser, 2006a). One for-profit college is independently owned and operated. This for-profit college continues to grow and expand while still claiming a family-owned type atmosphere. The second for-profit college was acquired by an LLC several years before this study and has the philosophy that they continue "to be operated as a family owned school." The final element of classification is highest degree awarded (Kinser, 2006a). One for-profit college offered only certificate and Associate's Degree programs. The other location had several Bachelor's Degree programs; however, the campuses chosen as research sites focused on certificate and Associate's Degree programs. The two for-profit colleges were regional, ownership was not based on shareholders, and the emphasis was on programs that offered certificates and Associate's Degrees.

There were several reasons for selecting for-profit colleges from the above categories. The proposed study was designed to focus on colleges from a smaller region; however, site selection was challenging. For-profit colleges can be difficult to recruit for

research (Lechuga, 2010; Tierney, Hentschke, & Hentschke, 2007). Large shareholder corporations would potentially have additional access hurdles such as a legal department, and single location for-profit colleges were often too small with limited program offerings. Because of the difficulty in getting for-profit colleges to participate, it was imperative to use my network to identify potential sites. I also selected for-profit colleges that were not under scrutiny from accreditors, the government, or the press, so participants could talk about their experience honestly without worrying about public implications. I selected for-profit colleges that had degree programs that were also available at community colleges for comparability.

Site selection for the community colleges was also an issue. The first community college site selected presented informal barriers to data collection. While I had approval from the college's institutional research department, I was unable to recruit participants, so after six months, I decided to pursue other research sites. Because of the challenge to access, I also had to use my network to locate community college sites. The community colleges selected for participation had several structural elements that make them more easily comparable to the for-profit colleges. Both community colleges have multiple satellite campuses, and both have a structure of professional academic advisors and counselors. Both colleges offer a variety of programs including vocational and transfer programs. One community college is located in the same town as the original campus of the first for-profit college. The second community college is located in a different state, but in close proximity to the locations of the other for-profit college.

The first for-profit college, Southwestern Medical College (pseudonym), is a growing regional college. Beginning as a family business, the college has experienced

substantial growth. Now employee-owned, this college continues to open locations across the western United States. Southwestern Medical College is focused on degree and certificate programs in a variety of medical areas. Participants selected to interview were located at several of the college's older locations in the southwest. The second for-profit college, Western Technical College (pseudonym), has four locations in the western United States, two of which were selected for this study. Western Technical College has degree and certificate programs in technical, business, culinary, and medical fields. At the time of the interviews, the college was experiencing declining enrollments. The college was in the process of welcoming a new CEO and getting ready to implement changes based on the new CEO's plan. The third research site and first community college, Southwestern Community College (pseudonym), is multi-campus community college located in the southwestern United States. This community college includes both vocational certificate and degree programs as well as transfer opportunities for students. At the time of the interviews, Southwestern Community College had recently encountered some accreditation issues and was in the process of implementing substantial change, including the structure of college advising. Participants selected to interview were located at one of the larger campuses. The fourth college, Western Field Community College (pseudonym), is located in the western United States and has both main and satellite campuses and offers vocational degrees and certificates as well as transfer opportunities. Participants at all four colleges noted that they served a diverse student population, including many low-income, underrepresented minority, and first-generation students.

Participant Selection

Participants interviewed included staff in positions that directly interacted with students on a day-to-day basis in some type of advising capacity. Participation criteria were not only based on position, but also settings and processes (Maxwell, 2012, p. 96). Positions included academic advisors/counselors, student services coordinators, career services advisors, and program coordinators/directors for vocational programs. Based on the work of Seidman (2006), interview participants were selected based on employment position, initial contact visits to research sites to determine appropriateness of participants, and willingness to be interviewed. Employment position was explored via the college's website and conversations with contacts within the college. Participants were all contacted via email after their supervisor or a colleague had contacted them about being interviewed. Because initial contact was made by a supervisor for many participants, it was important to emphasize that this was a voluntary interview in order to maintain validity (Seidman, 2006, p. 46).

Name of College	**Number of Participants**
Southwestern Medical College (for-profit college)	10
Western Technical College (for-profit college)	10
Southwestern Community College (community college)	10
Western Field Community College (community college	8
Total number of participants interviewed	38

Job titles and duties varied from college to college. There was an especially large difference in positions and how job duties were structured between the for-profit and community colleges. Participants were selected based on how and why their particular position interacted with students. Staff from admissions and financial aid were excluded

due to the nature of their positions. Faculty who only served as instructors or in a faculty-type advising role were also excluded. Each participant interacted with students on a daily basis in some sort of advising capacity. The 10 participants from Southwestern Medical College (SWMC) included several student services coordinators, several career services staff, and a few program directors. Western Technical College (WTC) had 10 participants: student services coordinators, career services staff, and several program directors. Job titles and duties at SWMC and WTC were very similar although program directors led very different programs at each college.

Southwestern Community College (SWCC), which provided 10 participants, has a staff that includes both professional academic advisors and licensed counselors. Each role comprises different responsibilities but serves students in a wide range of ways from course selection and enrollment to career advising. Program directors from SWCC, including several representing medical programs, were also interviewed. Western Field Community College (WFCC) only included 8 participants, and all were from their academic advising center. Limited participant selection was due to access challenges and varying roles that did not meet the criteria for interview participation. For example, multiple positions with the titles of program coordinator/director (or similar) had little to no interaction with students. Also, I was unable to access participants from the counseling center. WFCC's participants, while different from the other research sites, add to the research findings due to the professional nature of the advising center on campus. WFCC allowed me to expand my findings by considering an advising structure unique compared to the other colleges included.

Data Collection

I made initial contact with the two for-profit colleges through their President/CEOs. Once I gained permission to use specific campuses for each college, the President/CEO for each location sent emails out to potential participants. I then followed-up with each participant to verify that their position was appropriate to include and to schedule an interview time. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasized to support validity. Other participants at each for-profit college were selected through snowballing, either during scheduling emails, or once I was on campus for interviews.

For each community college site, I was required to go through their institution specific Institutional Review Board process. Once I was approved for the first community college, I was put in contact with high level administrators in student services areas who contacted the initial participants. For the second community college, I contacted a manager in a student services role who I had met at a professional conference. I then followed the same protocol at each community college that I had with the for-profit colleges. I followed-up with each participant to verify that they were appropriate to interview, schedule an interview time, and emphasize that participation was voluntary. I recruited additional participants through snowballing via email and once on campus.

Prior to arriving on campus for interviews, I reviewed various documents from each college to have a better understanding of the college before interviewing participants. Document review was designed to assist with a better understanding of the structure, policies, and procedures at each college before interviewing and to triangulate descriptions of experiences shared by participants. I went through the website of each college. Community college websites were much more comprehensive, similar to Iloh and Tierney's (2013) findings that community colleges tend to offer more information on

their websites. I also went through codes of conduct and college catalogs for a thorough understanding of formal policies and structure at each institution.

Interviews were designed to be semi-structured. While there was an interview protocol with pre-established interview questions, interviews focused on following the advice of Seidman (2006), including listening more and talking less, asking open ended questions, following up when the interviewer did not understand, asking the participant to explain something further in an effort to explore, and asking participants to share stories or specific examples. Follow-up questions often included a request for a specific story about a student or event in order to collect more than abstract data through the interviews (Maxwell, 2012).

Interviews were designed to take an hour based on feasibility issues discovered during the pilot study. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes depending on the participant. Often after the formal interview ended, many participants continued to share their experiences and stories related to the questions asked during the interview. Notes were taken immediately after data was gathered during these informal conversations. Interviews were either conducted in the offices of participants or in several cases, a community space on campus. Location of the interviews allowed me to see spatial details that inform the context of the participant, such as furniture arrangement and student access to the space (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997).

Observations were also made before and after scheduled interviews. I often arrived early to each campus and was able to sit in common areas and walk the campus for observation purposes. Both WTC campuses gave me a full tour of the campus as well as descriptions of different departments. Notes were taken during observations and

immediately after touring WTC. While documents and observations were used to gather data, the main source of data collection was interviews.

Data Analysis

Document analysis was used primarily to determine organizational structure, policy, and processes of individual colleges and then connect structure to interview and observation context. The for-profit college websites tended to include less procedural information (Iloh & Tierney, 2013). However, college catalogues at both for for-profit and community colleges included formal policy and rules for students. Document analysis took place prior to interviews in preparation for further data collection. Documents were mainly coded using descriptive coding as a way to index the document's content (Saldaňa, 2009).

All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participant via a signed Institutional Review Board approved consent form. Recording interviews is helpful in collecting reliable data so that the researcher has a record to refer to during analysis (Seidman, 2006, p. 114). All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim into word processing documents. Transcription was done by the researcher as a way to become more familiar with the data prior to formal analysis (Seidman, 2006, p. 115). During transcription, I began memo writing if something on the recording initiated a thought process that may be helpful for analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 118). Coding and analysis of transcribed interviews was done using word documents and printed versions of the interviews so that I could cut and move pieces of different interviews for comparison.

During the pilot study, I had become aware of the uniqueness of the narratives shared by staff I interviewed at the for-profit college. These narratives were unfamiliar to me because the voices of this population have been predominately absent in the higher education research literature, potentially due to the difficulty of gaining access to employees at for-profit colleges (Lechuga, 2010). Because of the uniqueness of the stories of the for-profit college staff, I used in vivo coding to first code the data in an attempt to accurately capture the participants' perceptions through their own words. In vivo coding is one of the most appropriate ways to explore perceptions of a population that has been understudied because it can help "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaňa, 2009, p. 91). In vivo coding also enabled me to pull out language from the interviews that participants use in their everyday work lives (Saldaňa, 2009, p. 92), instead of language about staff/student interactions created and used by researchers in higher education. For example, language used to describe students at for-profit colleges often included similar phrases to "It comes down to want, desire," and also "My expectation is that they come to school like they are going to work." These were both important in vivo codes based on the language of participants that honor how participants frame the students they work with.

In vivo coding is especially beneficial in the coding process because beyond honoring the participant's voice, it can highlight potential dimensions of categories and concepts. In vivo coding was useful for discovering words and phrases that participants used repetitively and emphasized. This type of coding was also useful to discover ideas repeated by different participants that may have otherwise gone unnoticed (Saldaňa, 2009, pg. 93). For example, several in vivo codes from the interviews include "Working

with [this college], it's such a good company," "Anyway that I can improve myself as a pre-professional advisor," and "They are now a part of our profession." Without in vivo codes, I may not have noticed a dimension in what came to be central to my findings, different institutional agent typologies.

Next, I went through the interviews using descriptive coding. I chose descriptive coding to get an overall picture of my data. Saldaňa (2009, p. 88) recommends descriptive coding to determine the data's basic topics. I found that it was important to understand the general content of the data before moving on to more complex analytic methods (Saldaňa, 2009, p. 89). The codes "framing students" and "serving interests" became important codes later in analysis. I was also able to incorporate several subcodes into my descriptive coding. Subcodes can add to the specificity of coding and are useful for coding data in studies with multiple participants (Saldaňa, 2009, p. 77). One particularly important code that included several subcodes was "serving interests." Under this code, subcodes were developed after initial descriptive and in vivo coding. Interviews were coded again using the subcodes "student," "corporate," "disciplinary," "employer," and "positional." These codes became the basis of my framing of institutional agent typologies.

I also used process coding as an analytical tool (Saldaňa, 2009). Process coding allows the researcher to explore processes and subprocesses, which are "the individual tactics, strategies, and routine actions that make up the larger act" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 169). Because the research questions for this study focus on the participant's framing of students, whose interests participants describe themselves serving, and the processes participants use to navigate their daily work, process coding is one of the most

appropriate methods. Process coding allowed me to explore the participants' experiences and interactions with students focusing on psychological concepts and actions (Saldaňa, 2009, p. 96). Process coding helped me visualize how participants saw themselves serving students and other stakeholders through their daily work. By charting process coding, I was able to develop agent typologies according to whose interests were described being served in process coding. Examples of process coding include "explaining the policy to the student," "defining student success," "promoting the institution," and "valuing disciplinary ideals." Exploring process codes was insightful for understanding the participant's framing of the student within the structure of the institution.

I also used provisional coding (Saldaňa, 2009) as an analytical tool. To use provisional coding, a researcher must have an already established set of codes prior to starting data collection. Based the work of Lipsky (2010) and Stanton-Salazar (2011), I used a set of provisional codes, which were closely connected with my descriptive codes, to explore how the experiences of my participants connected to my conceptual framework. Provisional codes included, "serving student interests," "serving corporate interests," "framing student success," "framing failure," and "policy implementation." Several of the provisional codes were not generated until I started either fieldwork or analysis. The changing nature of the provisional codes was used as a validity measure based on Saldaňa's (2009) suggestion to be cautious with provisional codes. Saldaňa (2009) warns that if a researcher is not willing to be flexible with provisional codes created prior to fieldwork, there is a danger that you will find exactly what you expected to find, even if it's not really there.

After using each coding method described above for each individual interview, codes were analyzed and entered into an excel spreadsheet. The excel database was used to explore potential patterns in the data and compare different types of codes. At this time, transcripts and codes were also reviewed and memos were written, using the questioning and comparison analytical tools suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 69-74). Through memo writing, different coding categories were explored and concepts about participant experiences began to emerge. Questions and comparisons about each participant's perspective of students and the institution led to further analysis of descriptive categories simultaneously with process coding. During the questions and comparisons process, a coding matrix was used to look at and compare descriptive subcodes and process coding across participants and types of colleges. The coding matrix allowed me to better understand how processes worked within the descriptive subcodes.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that are important to discuss. The first limitation is the shortened interview format to accommodate participants' time constraints. Closely following Seidman's (2006, p. 16-21) recommendations for phenomenological interviewing would have been beneficial for exploring participant's daily experience and perceptions of students, particularly a third interview dedicated to meaning-making. The shortened interview format made it challenging to explore participants' responses outside of the interview protocol. In addition, the variance in types of positions at for-profit and community colleges created complications because while many positions were similar, they were not close enough in scope of job duties to be compared as parallel positions.

The for-profit college participants were recommended as interview candidates from a member of their organization who has authority over their positions. While participants were told that interviews were both voluntary and confidential, this could still potentially be an issue if participants felt obligated to be interviewed (Seidman, 2006, p. 46). There is also a risk of reactivity, participants reacting to the presence of a researcher (Maxwell, 2012), with a study involving for-profit colleges. The risk of reactivity could be especially prevalent in the for-profit colleges because participants may feel the need to protect the image of their institution due to the overwhelmingly negative media attention these types of colleges have experienced in the last several years. Because research findings focus on whose interests participants perceive themselves serving, the risk of reactivity is especially important to consider in data analysis.

As the research tool, my positionality is imperative to acknowledge in order to mitigate bias (Maxwell, 2012). Maxwell suggests that research can stem from the researcher's professional experience. My impetus for conducting an exploration of institutional agents' perceptions of students and situating the exploration partially in the for-profit sector comes from my professional experience as an admissions representative at a for-profit college. My experience informs my perspective and connections as an insider and allows me to speak the language of and identify with the experiences of many of the institutional agents I interviewed. However, I acknowledge the potential bias and opportunity to make incorrect assumptions about the language and experiences of those I interviewed. I had to be aware of both defensive emotions and critical judgments that stem from my experience working at a for-profit college and the relationships I built there with staff and faculty. Because of my direct connections to personnel, I had assumptions

about why a person would choose to work at a particular type of institution. Specifically, I assumed that most community college advisors/counselors were passionate and knowledgeable about theories and approaches to student success, whereas for-profit college personnel would not be and had other motives for pursuing their line of work. I addressed my assumptions by adjusting questions after reviewing pilot study data and by talking through questions, my conceptual framework, and findings with my advisor.

For all participant interviews and analysis of interviews, I had to be aware of assumptions about insider knowledge. I have worked at a for-profit college, come through a community college as a student, and currently work professionally as an academic advisor, though not at a for-profit or community college. During interviews, I had to be sure I was asking clarifying questions when participants assumed I understood concepts or ideas they were discussing. During analysis, I had to use memos and the analytic tool of questioning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 69-73) in an attempt to not assume meaning in my analysis.

In order to counteract validity threats common in qualitative research due to researcher bias and reactivity, I included several validity tests recommended by Maxwell (2012). I searched for negative cases that work against my guiding theory and examined data to determine whether I needed to modify my conclusions based on negative cases. I also triangulated data using interviews, observations, and document analysis as a test for the self-reporting bias and reactivity implicit in interviewing as a method of inquiry.

The conclusions developed from the findings of this study are not generalizable to greater external populations because of the contextual and local emphasis assumed in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2012). Instead, findings are intended to provide a more in-

depth framework for understanding the daily work of institutional agents. Based on the type of data collected (interviews of student services personnel), the findings of this research study are not intended to draw conclusions about whose interests are actually being served by student services personnel/institutional agents. Instead, findings are designed to understand the process of how institutional agents respond to stakeholder pressures in their daily work, how institutional agents frame the students they work with, and as a lens to view how institutional agents perceive themselves serving various stakeholders.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of my research is to explore the process of how institutional agents (referred to as IAs throughout the findings) navigate the complexity of their position and organizational context. I proposed to do this by looking at how IAs frame the students they work with and whose interests IAs see themselves serving in their daily work. I explored how IAs frame their students as a way to better understand whose interests IAs see themselves serving, particularly in terms of student success. I started by focusing on the two most obvious types of interests that an IA can serve, the interests of the student and the interests of the organization. I had expected to find that IAs framed students differently according to the sector in which they worked. Specifically, I expected that IAs at community colleges would frame students in a way that put the onus on the student for student success and with little to no acknowledgement of any potential institutional or external barriers. I expected that IAs at for-profit colleges would remove onus from the student because the for-profit college structure is more compatible with serving and meeting the needs of non-traditional students (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). The way that IAs frame students is justification for whose interests they serve. I expected that in some cases, serving the interests of students and the interests of the institution would be compatible or reliant upon each other. I also expected there to be instances where serving student interests and institutional interests were incompatible.

The interests that emerged as important in IA narratives were much more complex than I had expected. I expected how IAs framed students and whose interests they served to be complicated and nuanced, however, my original lens was limited to either student interests or organizational interests. I had also expected large differences in the framing

of students and interests served between IAs at for-profit and community colleges. While there are different patterns in the way IAs at for-profit versus community colleges frame the students that they work with and interests that they serve, there are also a large number of similarities. Differences in student framing and exploration of stakeholder interests are not significant enough that they occur solely in one sector or the other. Often times patterns that occur predominately at one type of college, also occur at the other, though perhaps with a lower frequency. At both types of colleges, IAs must consider a number of stakeholders, institutional and policy constraints, and student needs in their daily work. This makes their interactions with students more complicated and viewing their work through the lens of simply "institutional agent serving student" excludes much of what an IA must consider in their daily work.

To describe the process of how IAs navigate the complexity of their position and organizational context, I will first share my findings describing how IAs frame the students they serve. I will describe the themes that emerged from IA narratives about the students they interact with on a daily basis and then define different interests that IAs articulate as being influential or that appear regularly in IA narratives. I will illustrate what it looks like when an IA is serving a particular interest. Each interest is described standing alone, but it is not meant to simplify the reality that serving various interests is complex and nuanced. Interview quotes have been changed only to remove filler words such as "you know," to remove identifiable information, or shorten text so that only applicable pieces of interview responses appear. When removing any portion of text, I reviewed quotes carefully to honor the meaning of participants and to not distort the intention of their speech.

Framing Students

IAs have perceptions of the students they work with and those perceptions influence the way that IAs interact with and serve students. Perceptions of students can dictate how much effort an IA exerts to assist a student and how an IA connects students to additional resources. The perceptions IAs have of students are also revealing of particular assumptions IAs make about students and student success. IAs carry assumptions about how a successful student behaves and how successful outcomes are defined. IAs also carry assumptions about what type of students, student behaviors, and student outcomes are deserving of their time. During interviews, IAs were asked to describe students in a number of ways, such as what a successful student looks like, how students change while they're in college, and which students they went the extra mile for. Oftentimes, when IAs framed students and student success, they did so from a student deficit perspective, highlighting what a student lacks as opposed to the value, skills, and experiences students bring with them to college. For-profit colleges are more likely than community colleges to have structures designed to address student deficits, including mandatory advising, limited course choices, and direct links to employers (Rosenbaum et al., 2007). Most IAs qualified their answers with the explanation that they were making generalizations and that not every student fit neatly into their descriptions and responses. Several broad themes emerged as IAs talked about their perceptions of students. These themes have been designated IA/student interactions, why students succeed (or don't succeed), and framing students as product.

IA/Student Interaction

IAs were asked to talk about both students that they felt they had the greatest impact on and students they went the extra mile for or put more time into assisting. While a few IAs identified particular populations, for example first-generation students (much more likely with IAs at community colleges) or medical students, a majority of IAs defined students they had the largest impact on or spent more time with based on a few behavioral characteristics. In particular, IAs identified two main reasons they may put more time into assisting students: student need and student effort.

Some IAs defined their time with students in terms of need. IAs acknowledged that some students have experiences or circumstances that make them more vulnerable to "failure" and therefore need additional assistance. Students who were struggling received extra help and extra time from these IAs. This attitude appeared at both the for-profit and community colleges. Several IAs described the details of types of students that fell into the category of struggling or having additional needs. Here, a program coordinator/director at a community college describes the students that she spends additional time assisting.

> Anne: I'm going to say this and I don't mean it in a pejorative way, but there are students who are needier, who are needier academically, emotionally, psychologically, logistically. Yeah, so I do spend more time with students who are more underprepared.

While IAs like Anne focused their descriptions on students who needed more assistance, others described students who were "more self-sufficient." Those students "don't need as much," and therefore IAs could spend less time with those students and more with others who had a greater need. While describing why he might spend more time on a particular

student, one IA explicitly noted that when he spent extra time with students, it was not a result of whether he liked the student, but instead, based on their need.

> Bill: I do not treat [students] equally and I tell them up front and it's not based upon whether I like them or not. It's based on what do they need at that moment.

IAs identified students who were struggling more than others or seemed to have a greater need for support, whether it was because the students came in underprepared, did not have a support network outside of school, or a myriad of other reasons. In other words, students were more likely to receive extra time or effort from these IAs based on external variables that could influence a student's academic performance. IAs used their time with these students to identify additional resources, "hand-hold" through bureaucratic processes, or listen to the student's challenges and wins.

Another lens IAs used to discuss students that they spent more time assisting was to identify students who seemed to put in effort or students that an IA deemed as motivated. This was a prevalent framing of why IAs spent more time assisting some students. IAs determined that if the student was willing to put more time into their education (or educational services), then the student was deserving of extra time and effort from the IA. Several IAs included descriptions of what they expected from students who they thought were deserving of extra time and effort. Examples of student effort included students who continually came back to meet with an IA, followed college processes, and asked questions. A few IAs described that they would put in extra time and effort for students who were engaged. Several described the "engaged" students they might go the extra mile for.

> Kacey: If a student has shown that they're really engaged, they want to be here, and they want something out of this, rather than just, “I just need to know what to take next semester.”

Many IAs expected students to come to meetings prepared and behaving in a way that demonstrated the student was engaged, such as not using their cell phone during the meeting and taking notes. Because IAs viewed the students as engaged and “really putting that effort in,” they were also “right there putting in as much effort as they are.”

IAs could determine what they considered “effort” and when they expected students to demonstrate that effort. One way a student could demonstrate effort was during meetings with IAs. Other IAs asked students to demonstrate that they were putting in effort outside of the meeting before they went the extra mile for them.

> Ruth: I'll say, "What have you done? This is your life, your career. What have you done?" They said, "I've done X, Y, Z." I go, "Ok, let me try and see what I can do. Make calls on your behalf or give you some resources.”

IAs had enough discretion in their interactions with students to determine who they would go the extra mile for or who they would spend additional time assisting. In Ruth’s case, her discretion allowed her to determine who had access to particular resources. IAs made determinations about who to spend more time on based on student behavior while in college. The onus was on the student to prove they were worthy of extra time and effort, either through their behaviors during meetings with IAs or by demonstrating they had put “effort” in prior to the meeting. The amount of effort a student puts into their educational experience moves away from deficit framing, however, effort is determined dependent upon the assumptions IAs have about merit and work.

Agent Views on Why Students Succeed (or don’t)

IAs had varying views of why students succeed or don't succeed. Some views of why a student might succeed or not succeed focused on a quality of that student, such as a student's desire to succeed. IA's framing of a student quality impacted student/IA interactions and IAs often framed students that they were willing to go the extra mile for as having a specific desire to succeed. Like Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats, it was left to the discretion of the IA to determine what the desire to succeed looked like in practice and who had that desire. Other views of reasons that students succeed or don't succeed centered on external variables, such as a student's need to work and/or care for family. At times, IAs determined that it was the responsibility of the student to resolve challenges from external variables. Other times, responding to challenges and providing resources for the student was seen as the responsibility of the college. Much less often, IAs cited the context of the institution, such as resource constraints or punitive college policies as a reason a student might <u>not</u> succeed.

Student Qualities

IAs often framed student success in terms of a student's desire to succeed. Framing desire as key to student success focused responsibility on the student, as opposed to institutional or external variables. IAs often clarified that there were many institutional and external variables that interfered with student success, however, lack of desire to succeed or what several IAs referred to as "that want," was often described as a key factor in students not succeeding in college. IAs explained that "students need to want it," and that, "if students want it, they'll be successful."

> Jeanette: They can do it as long as they have that want. I believe that if you want it that bad, you'll get it done.

Not all IAs had determined that if a student wants to succeed "that bad" then they will be successful. Often IAs felt that a desire or "that want" was a key part of student success but not the only reason a student might not succeed. IAs also noted that students may not know about or be accessing available resources or might have external variables and competing external priorities that interfered with college success. However, IAs often expressed that "that want" was a key component in student success.

IAs explained why they believed a student may not have the desire to succeed, or "that want." Student's lack of desire was sometimes connected to either parents or unemployment programs. In other words, students were attending college because somebody else was forcing them to attend. IAs often felt that if students were influenced to attend college by someone else, then they were potentially missing a key factor in student success. Connecting a student's lack of desire with an outside influence was prevalent at both for-profit and community colleges. IAs discussed various outside influences, such as workforce programs, parents, and even high school counselors. One IA explained that if a student was having their education paid for through a workforce program, their "motivation level" might be lower than someone who "invested in their own" education. The most common cited outside influence in student's college attendance was familial pressure.

> Leslie: The students that aren't succeeding, it seems to me, are those ones that maybe mom and dad have dumped them here as a last resort because they tried community college or they tried university and they haven't figured out what they want yet.
>
> Mary: I find a lot of them don't really connect what they're doing here with long term goals a lot of times. A lot of them are just like, "Well, my mom told me I had to go to college or I had to get a full-time job. I'm here, and so what do I have to do?"

Familial pressure was described in multiple ways. IAs discussed that some families expected students to attend college. Additionally, students might be attending so they could avoid working. In many cases, outside influence to attend college was connected to a student's lack of long-term goals related to college enrollment. Outside influence to attend college wasn't always described negatively, however, it was still important for students to have "that want" even if they were attending college because somebody else wanted them to.

> Jeanette: So it was just an eye opener that a lot of students come here because their parents want them to, which is a good thing but at the same time the student has to want it because I think that has a lot to do with their success rate.

Jeanette explored the idea that if a student experiences familial pressure to attend, that can be positive, as long as the student still has some internal motivation to attend college. Whether or not students had external influences in their decision to attend college, having a desire to succeed in college, or "that want" was a frame that appeared repeatedly in a majority of IA interviews.

Other frames of student success that appeared in interviews also put the onus on the student. A more complex frame of student success was student perseverance or "grit." When IAs explored this framing of students and student success, they acknowledged that success in college was fraught with "obstacles and bumps," but being able to persevere through challenges was an important factor in student success. A few IAs described what it looked like for students to persevere through challenges and succeed.

> Erin: The will, the determination to not give up at the first thing that - you fail math, don't give up, fight through it type thing. I think put really simply, skill versus will.
>
> Kristy: I think they need some type of grit to kind of overcome the different challenges and barriers that they're going to encounter when they're in school,

> even if it's just dealing with an instructor that they don't like. Well, how are you going to cope with that?

IAs expressed that students would encounter challenges during their time in college, some small and some more difficult to overcome. Students needed "grit" or "will" to continue in college when they experienced challenges. At times, when IAs framed student success in terms of grit and perseverance, the idea that students needed to have "that want" or motivation level was connected to persisting through challenges. Other times, desire and grit were not connected frames. When IAs used perseverance as a frame to describe student success, ultimately responsibility still fell on the student to succeed, but external factors played more of a role in the path to student success.

Several IAs framed struggling students as lacking key critical thinking or study skills. Lack of critical thinking or understanding how to study college level material was often tied to a student's experience in high school. IAs explained that students struggled to synthesize material and apply concepts they were learning. Instead, students came from an educational background where they were supposed to "memorize, memorize, memorize" or where students were trained to "parrot information." A few IAs expressed that when students arrived on campus, "they still want you to stand up in front and give them the facts that they can write down [and be tested on]."

> Patricia: They don't understand how to study. They don't really have professional skills that are developed much at all. Their writing skills aren't good. We pretty much have to start with setting expectations of like professionally what we want to see because…I don't see that it's really being taught before they're here, and they just want us to tell them how to think or what information they need to know. They don't really know how to study and grasp it and work with it and do critical thinking.

Patricia was one of several IAs that connected study skills, critical thinking, and professional skills. This framing was especially prevalent when IAs discussed students in

programs related to the medical field. At the for-profit colleges, a few IAs explored the connection of critical thinking and professionalism beyond students in medical related programs. One IA described how lack of critical thinking skills meant that often students couldn't overcome simple challenges because they didn't have the problem-solving skills to work through difficulties if a solution wasn't obvious. Students would see a challenge and "throw their hands up in the air" and give up. While some IAs portrayed critical thinking as an innate quality, others took responsibility for helping students develop critical thinking skills alongside college-level study skills.

Another student quality that IAs believed often interfered with student success was lack of soft skills. Soft skills were often a student deficit that IAs needed to address in interactions, however, like the occupational colleges in Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person's (2007) study, for-profit colleges inserted practices and policy into the classroom and structure to address soft skills related to professional development. Soft skills were often described as ability to communicate and the adoption of professional capital appropriate for the work place, such as how to interact with an employer. A student's lack of soft skills was highly problematic for many IAs because it interfered with professionalism and was difficult to teach to students. One IA discussed the issue of teaching students soft skills because "those soft skills, unfortunately, you can't really put into a classroom." Though some IAs felt that soft skills were difficult or impossible to teach within the classroom, others believed that it was possible for students to develop soft skills throughout the course of their program.

> John: I see students that I met them and initially I thought, "There's no way this person's ever going to get a job," just because of their attitude and the way they come across, but then you get to see them kind of make some changes throughout

> the length of their program, and they start to develop some skills, some soft skills especially.

Though some IAs believed that soft skills could be developed during a program of study, these skills seemed to be more difficult to teach and were often the reason that students weren't successful during field work or after graduation. One IA discussed surveys he had conducted with employers. He found that employers were reporting that the reason many people lost jobs had "nothing to do with technical skills, it has everything to do with the soft skills and the work ethic type things." Other IAs also described employees losing their jobs for reasons outside of technical skill.

> Mark: They need us to really support those personal skills and soft skills way more than the technical attributes I think we give them. I can teach someone how to sauté in one day or two and be pretty darn good at it, but getting them to change the way they speak to people, the respect they have for people, that's a big challenge. Getting them to come to school on time and impressing upon them if you don't do it here and come to school on time, you're probably not going to do it in the work force. In our industry, if you're late enough we just fire you because we don't have time to wait for you to see if you're coming in that day.

Like Mark, IAs at the for-profit colleges often emphasized soft skills by contrasting those to the technical skills. Some IAs at the for-profit colleges lumped soft skills and professionalism into the same category. It was a student's responsibility to develop soft skills, although both for-profit colleges had mechanisms in place to help students develop skills related to professional behavior. Students were graded on their professionalism, such as showing up to class on time and dressing appropriately. Students were also expected to communicate to the college if they were going to be absent from school. Both for-profit colleges had highly active career services staff who coached students on professionalism, interviewing, and communicating in the workplace. The mechanisms were in place because soft skills were emphasized at the for-profit colleges and many IAs

determined that it was soft skills that often kept a student from being successful, particularly in their externship or post-graduation job.

Beyond the Student – External Variables

Many IAs determined that student success could be complicated and IAs referred to a number of variables that could impact a student's ability to succeed. Some variables focused onus on the student and others focused on external factors that influenced a student's attendance or academic performance. IAs found that some students, particularly students they classified as non-traditional, were "balancing family and work, and oftentimes more than one work responsibility." Oftentimes, external variables such as work or family network were framed as deficits, interfering with college as top priority. The addition of an academic load to a student's already full schedule meant that receiving good grades and academic success were especially challenging. In addition to work and family, IAs noted that some students experienced challenges outside of college that impacted their academics.

> Bryan: A lot of times there is something behind them being not successful, some sort of reason for it that usually we can solve pretty easily…We have information for day care situations, and if they can't afford it, programs that they can contact and apply to help with assistance. Transportation often times is an issue with students, they don't have a vehicle. They can't even sometimes afford a bus pass. We have programs to offer that, when we can do that. We also have food banks if they're entire budget is spent and they're going hungry. A starving student isn't learning.

Bryan discussed several challenges students encountered, including lack of basic needs. Another IA noted that the main factors that kept students from succeeding in school were the "holy trinity, that's transportation, childcare, and money slash work." Lack of access

to resources from affordable childcare to transportation were often reasons that IAs determined a student might struggle in college.

While IAs acknowledged that external variables often played a large part in the hurdles students faced, some IAs determined that the college was able to provide enough resources to resolve any external challenges. Therefore, if a student was unable to succeed, it was due to the student not accessing appropriate resources and not institutional or external barriers. Many IAs descried the different resources put in place by the college to address those external challenges and the students' responses to those resources.

> Tamara: So this particular student, the car broke down and part of my job is if that happens, try and see if there's anybody coming from the area that can help carpool, ride share type of thing. A few students were found. The student just didn't do it. The student, even after the tools were given to them, they didn't take advantage of the tools and then they just quit.

IAs sometimes believed that they and the institution did everything they could for the student, and if the student didn't use the resources or listen to the information provided, then the student was at fault for not being successful. IAs could "talk until we're blue in the face," but felt that "if they don't actually use the information that we give them, they're going to have to learn the hard way." One IA noted that when students didn't use the resources and information provided at orientation, it indicated a "level of disinterest" from the student. When it came to overcoming challenges that could potentially prevent student success, IAs often shifted back and forth between putting onus on the student, as described above, and responsibility on external variables.

A few IAs determined that one of the reasons that students were not accessing resources or assistance was because they found it difficult to believe that IAs were there

to help them. IAs found that they had to put some time and effort into convincing students that they were there to help. One IA stated that it could take months before students believed "that we really are here to make you successful. We are not here to just keep the cream of the crop." IAs discussed that the belief that personnel at the college were not there to help students stemmed from previous educational experiences.

> Mark: A lot of them have not had a great educational experience in their earlier years, so they're skeptical of what we do in a sense. We tell them we support them, but they're sometimes scared to reach out for that support, whether it's how to do homework or how to figure out how to get a ride to school.

The framing that students didn't believe that IAs were there to help was mostly found at the for-profit colleges, and not often expressed at the community colleges. In career services, distrust was discussed in terms of post-graduation, with some IAs addressing students feeling like, "Are they just saying it, or are they going to help us really get a job?" IAs used a range of techniques from developing relationships with students to putting in extra effort to prove to the students that they were there to support them. In cases where students may not be convinced that IAs were there to support them, the IA often took responsibility for convincing the student, blaming previous educational institutions and experiences, as opposed to blaming the student for their distrust.

Many IAs operated with the understanding that school should be priority for students. IAs discussed how students who had other priorities, such as family first, no matter what, might struggle to succeed because school was not their number one priority. IAs shared that on a student's list of priorities, college might not be "their main one," and so those students "aren't thriving as well because of other things going on in their lives that have taken priority." For degree programs that demanded more time, a student might not be "willing to cut their [work] hours enough to be in here enough to be successful."

Many IAs described how prioritizing work or family over school could interfere with a student's ability to succeed.

> Rachel: A lot of what I've noticed with a lot of them is that they're working too much and it could be because they have a family to take care of. They don't qualify for financial aid. Some of the students I've seen put work as their priority and sometimes they have to, they still have to pay bills.

Like Rachel, IAs acknowledged that a student's external priorities may be essential for students to focus on. IAs described how even though education should be a priority, "you have to appreciate a lot of these students jump through so many hoops and struggle just to get here every day." For some students, "a non-traditional family unit of support" was seen as essential by IAs because those relationships were "connections that our students have to make for survival." While many IAs described family and friend connections in terms of support, some saw those relationships as interfering with student success. Erin described students' relationships in terms of socio-economic status and the priorities of the working class.

> Erin: Students in poverty, if you draw a circle, and you have their priorities, at the center of that is family and friends, so relationships are their main focus, whereas someone in the middle class, who is upwardly mobile, their main goal is success and feeling good about themselves and, you know, keeping up with the Jones so to speak. So you have this population and more than half of our students fall into that category and I can't tell you how many times it's been proven true for me. "My mom got laid off, I had to go, you know, she" - Everything is about their family. "Why did you leave class when you know you're on attendance warning?" "Because my mom's car broke down on the side of the freeway and I had to go pick her up." They drop everything. There's nothing else that goes above it. "Why'd you miss class?" "Oh, my sister had to go to work and had no one to watch her kids." And I'm like, "But what about your schooling?" They don't think about it in that way because they'll drop everything.

Erin saw students prioritizing familial support as problematic because it took away from the student's ability to be present for class. College as priority was a way of framing student success that spanned across the for-profit and community colleges. Most IAs

approached students with multiple priorities from a place of understanding. However, some IAs placed responsibility on the student to make college a top priority, regardless of what it cost the student to do so.

Several IAs cited institutional barriers, including barriers to accessing financial aid funding, as reasons a student might not complete college. Colleges were described as "big and impersonal," which made it challenging for students to navigate their experience. IAs discussed this as being especially true for students who came in with limited college knowledge.

> Luis: Where are they coming from? Are they first-generation? Do they have that experience in the household of higher education from their mom, their dad, brother, sister that can help coach them along the way? I think that might simplify the process for them or give them some sort of, "Oh, I see how it works, and that's the path I'm going to take because it worked for my brother."

Processes at college could be complicated and students might have to jump through extra hoops to continue. IAs at community colleges often brought up policies that could add hurdles to a student's registration process. Some IAs believed these policies could have a positive impact on students because they had to come into advising or counseling and connect with an IA. Others felt that policies created one more reason a student may not continue in college.

> Stephanie: Sometimes the system can be a barrier as well. They may apply and they may get a hold on their account because they haven't filled out a form and then they don't know that and then they go to register and they can't register until they fill out this form, and then they fill out this form and then they're like ineligible for financial aid, and then there's multiple people that they have to go talk to, and I think sometimes students, when it reaches that point, they get so discouraged that they're just like, "I'm just going to give up," you know.

IAs described the different institutional hurdles that students might encounter as they attempted to navigate their college experience. Discussion of institutional hurdles was far

less prevalent than discussions of variables outside of the organization that might cause challenges for students. Instances where institutional hurdles were named as impediments to student success indicated a shift in how students were framed by IAs. In these cases, a lack of student success was the direct responsibility of the college. IAs didn't shift blame to student demographics or student's knowledge of college, but instead policies and processes put in place by the college. External variables, such as transportation and work, and institutional hurdles are factors that can influence student success and represent a different framing than connecting student success to student motivation and soft skills.

Students as Product

When IAs discussed preparing students for their future jobs or career pathway, some framed the student as a product. This framing is closely tied with Hentschke's (2010) employer as customer lens and is different from viewing the student as customer. When students are framed as a product, the end goal is not necessarily to provide the student with a service (their education), but instead to provide employers with a ready-to-go employee. Some IAs, such as Andrew below, were explicit about framing students as a product.

> Andrew: My goal is to build the program. I want it to grow. I want it to be strong, and quite honestly, I want to help this company make money and have quality product for the workforce. That's not necessarily about me, but that's where I gain my satisfaction in the job, is knowing that we've been able to produce a quality product and put them out there and do it efficiently for the company...

While other IAs may not use the word product like Andrew, they discussed that they expected when students graduated, the student would be a particular type of employee. The ideal employee graduating from the college was "somebody who is invisible, that's just there all the time and you can count on them and they're just going to do their job."

IAs encouraged students to refrain from creating problems and to try to go unnoticed, to be "somebody who will show up every day and work hard and not get into hassles with people and not question when somebody asks them to do something." These IAs saw themselves as aiding with the formation of the ideal employee.

Framing the student as a product was much more prevalent at the for-profit colleges, with hardly any community college IAs framing students this way. Though both community colleges in this study felt pressure from state, federal, or accrediting policy, IAs did not feel the same burden to produce placement numbers since community colleges are not impacted by gainful employment regulation to the extent for-profit colleges are. For career services units that are under pressure to produce certain placement numbers, relationships with employers are important. A student who doesn't behave as a "product" graduating from that college should, could jeopardize an employer relationship and make it challenging to place future students with that employer. As IAs discussed, a ruined relationship with an employer damages the opportunity "for future students and future grads who want to apply there."

> Nikki: [This college] is notorious for having some of the best student and affiliate relationships out in the field. Our relationships that we have with our clinical sites, with our extern sites, things like that, are such great relationships that our policies, the things that we've asked our students to do very early on in their education have set them up to be successful.

If the student entered the workforce and behaved the way they had been trained to, the college was able to create and maintain a good reputation among employers. Nikki also begins to describe how behaviors that fit in with the ideal employee (or product) are reinforced in the classroom and through the policies and procedures of the colleges. Many IAs discussed this process during their interview.

> Jerry: They're not only graded on academics, they're graded on professionalism. Just to give you an example, just say for instance a student - I tell them to treat it like a job because if you're late, if you're going to come in late or not show up to class, you have to call in or it will cost you points in class.

As Jerry described, SWMC has professionalism scoring embedded into their classrooms, which can affect a student's grade. WTC starts students out with a professional development class and holds events like "professional dress Tuesdays." For IAs that framed students as a product, developing professional behaviors that mirrored what would be expected of the student in the employment world was seen as a large part of an IA's job. IAs didn't always frame professional development in terms of the student as the product. However, the end goal at for-profit colleges is a student who is ready to begin a career in a specific field. The structure of the two for-profit colleges and their narrow mission (narrow in comparison with the community colleges) correlates with a focus on professional development and the development of the ideal employee who will go on to serve their employer. As described by Rosenbaum et al. (2007), for-profit colleges design programs and interventions with the assumption that students lack the soft skills needed for job placement. Students attend for-profit colleges with the explicit and sole goal of employment upon graduation from their program and IAs confirmed through their framing of students that they believed that. In addition, because of their role in connecting students to employers, IAs in career services roles were much more likely to frame students as a product.

Whether IAs framed students as a product, student success as connected to student qualities or external variables, or spent more times with students based on student effort or need, IAs had discretion in their framing of and interaction with students. Discretion in framing and interactions means that IAs could decide who was deserving of

extra time or resources. IA's framing of students also indicated whether they believed responsibility for student success fell on the student or the institution when the student encountered challenges. Frames like the student as a product are more telling of whose interests the IA see themselves serving. However, IA's framing of students was far more complicated than a singular frame and could change dramatically in a way that conflicted with a previously expressed frame depending on the topic of discussion. For example, an IA could express that they were astounded by the number of external challenges that some students had to overcome to get to class, and then discuss how they spent more time with students who had the desire to succeed (assuming sometimes these groups of students overlap and sometimes they do not). When IAs discussed their perception and framing of students, it was clear that they did so with a variety of stakeholders and variables in mind. This was evident when IAs avoided blaming the college as responsible for students not succeeding and shifted onus to students, their lack of college motivation, or inability to place college as their number one priority. IA frames of students as successful or not successful dependent on their ability to adopt certain soft skills or attitudes related to future employment or their particular program also related to which stakeholder needs IAs prioritized.

Defining Different Agents – Not Just an "Institutional Agent"

Exploring the way that IAs frame students and their interaction with students was useful in developing what I call agent typologies. Agent typologies are a lens for viewing a particular interest that an IA serves through their interactions, decisions, and activities. Each typology is a lens for viewing a specific stakeholder's interests. Rather than continuing with a singular definition of institutional agent, I instead have developed five

different agent typologies, including *student*, *corporate*, *employer*, *disciplinary*, and *positional*. A student agent puts their students first, invests in their students in various ways, and is not afraid to challenge structures or policies that interfere with an individual student's success. A corporate agent works to serve the interests of their college, prioritizes organizational needs over others, and will not challenge organizational structure or policy. An employer agent is focused on the needs of their students' future employers and works to build relationships with employers. Disciplinary agents view their position, their interactions with students, and the role of education through the lens of a particular discipline. Positional agents are highly connected to their career or role at the college and see their position as key to the success of the institution and students.

The way that an IA frames a student is connected to their typology. For example, a corporate agent is more likely to view the institution as having resources to assist students through external challenges and if a student is unable to succeed, it has little to do with the institution. In other words, a corporate agent is likely to focus responsibility for a student not succeeding on the student. While IA frames and agent typologies connect, it is challenging to draw perfect parallels between the two because IAs are complex and their context so nuanced. However, the various ways in which an IA frames students can act as a cue for how they view and serve various stakeholders and was informative in the development of typology descriptions.

No one IA is exactly one typology. Instead, each IA is a complicated combination of different typologies, with some typologies more prevalent than others in an IA's narrative. Typologies exist together, often complementing each other. An example of this would be the corporate and student agent as complementary when the success of the

college or student can easily lead to the success of the other. However, this is not always the case and often typology priorities conflict. In these cases, IAs must choose who or what comes first. In interviews, narratives related to specific typologies surfaced and disappeared depending on the context of the moment, but dominant typologies often emerged more often and as a pattern as IAs discussed students, policies, and their daily work. However, central to the research findings is that regardless of any emerging typology, IAs are still employees of their organization and they must still do the work of the organization, which often means acting as a policy enforcer. While IA stories and descriptions of their work were paramount in creating agent typologies, there was no intention to label any individual IA with a particular agent typology. Typologies only create a lens to view how and when various stakeholder interests are prioritized in an IA's narrative.

Typologies that appeared less often in IA's description of their daily work and framing of students have a less robust description below. Because the lens through which IAs view and interact with students and their college environment is dependent on the structure of the college in which they work, some typologies appear more often at one type of college or in one type of role. For example, IAs that demonstrated employer agent-like framing and narratives were more common at the for-profit colleges and in career services roles due to the nature of the for-profit college mission. However, employer agents were not limited to the for-profit colleges and career services roles. The structure of the institution can set up an IA up to serve students (Rosenbaum et al., 2007) or make it more challenging to assist students in navigating college processes. Many IAs

recognized that their college context enabled them to better serve students and that played a role in how they described their daily work.

Student Agent

The first typology is what I refer to as the *student agent*. A student agent's work is focused on the needs of the student. They put the student first and use their resources and network to advocate for the student. Student agents work to build trusting relationships with their students, are emotionally invested in their students, and meet their students where they are at, both academically and personally. When policy and structure interfere with a student's success, student agents aren't afraid to work around rules, find the gray area in policy, and use their network to challenge processes and policies that are creating hurdles for students. In addition, student agents see gaps in services and have a vision of how the college could better serve students.

Student agents put the student first, especially when they encounter time and priority constraints. A phrase that appeared over and over again when IAs were asked about their daily priorities was "students come first." The sentiment "my day consists of revolving around the students if they need me and then everything else follows" was a common theme. IAs shared how their time was organized to put students first.

> Vanessa: When we start to get busy, [supervisor] will say to us, "OK everybody, save your project time. Open up your schedule to take students." So they're our number one priority. They always come first.

Several IAs expressed that a "student first" attitude wasn't just about serving students ahead of everything else when they were busy, but the way they viewed the job of every person at the institution. These IAs had the philosophy that "our number one job here is the student. That's the number one focus of what everybody should be focused on, the

betterment of the student." The "student first" philosophy wasn't just applicable to those working directly with students, but IAs believed it also applied to administrators making decisions about the institution.

> Bill: I think they get caught up so much in the business of being an institution - all decisions should be based upon the good of students, not of programs, not of campuses, not of departments, not of the institution.

Like Bill, other IAs described how students should be at the forefront of every decision. Student agents focus on the student and make the student a priority, both in the way they organize time and the way they make decisions. When it comes to time, student agents make room to prioritize student needs and everything else waits. Student agents also prioritize student needs in their decision-making process, thinking about decisions in terms of "the betterment of the student."

Student agents work to build trust with students. Much like the high school counselor who built trusting relationships in Holland's (2015) study of institutional agents at a high school, student agents build relationships with their students that are based on trust. Many IAs described how they built trust with students and how that trust affected their relationships with students. Oftentimes, building trust with a student meant "really trying to convey to them that we do care." Several IAs expressed that their interactions with a student could be "the first time in their lives" that "somebody cares" about the student's academic performance and whether they show up to class. IAs noted multiple strategies to build trust, from an open-door policy to "every student gets my [cell] phone number." Many IAs believed that a trusting relationship could mean consistency and someone students could rely on.

> Luis: I think we have the opportunity here at the college for the most part to develop those relationships that students need during their first years, and you kind of inadvertently get yourself a non-official cohort of students because they keep coming back to you because they trust you. You've built a relationship, they don't want to go to somebody else and start the story all over, the transaction, and they're comfortable with you.

Student agents do what they can to build trusting relationships with students and be that person at the college that the student can come to for help at any time. At both community colleges, multiple IAs expressed frustration about the constraints that prevented them from developing trusting relationships. One IA described that it could "be really challenging because we're not able to develop that rapport with the students and a lot of appointments have to be very business." Lack of resources made it challenging for IAs at the community colleges to spend the quantity and quality of time they felt they needed to build the kind of relationships that would allow them to best support students. Student agents see the value in trusting relationships with students and work to build those relationships so that they can best support students.

Student agents are emotionally invested in their students and act accordingly. IAs described how students leaned on them for support for everything from failing a class to the death of a child. In interviews, when IAs talked about emotional investment and supporting students, many of them showed emotion. Sometimes IAs smiled as they discussed the success of a particular student, and several even cried as they described the students they worked with.

> Holly: What I like about the community college student is they're hungry. They're hungry for knowledge, they're hungry for a better life (begins to cry). I'm sorry - (crying) and they hang on by their fingernails to get their degree, to get through it. Every step of the way these students are fighting because of the obstacles they have against them and in front of them. I don't know that I've seen a student that had an easy road here at [this college] or in life in general, you know what I mean? And that's one of the things I appreciate about them, is that they have that

> perseverance and that grit to get through it, because nothing for them has been easy (pause). Sorry. I love these students (laughing and crying).

IAs even spent time outside of scheduled meetings investing in and supporting students. For example, one IA described that they might "ask them in the hallway, are they doing their homework? And how's class going?" Some IAs shared how they took student failure personally, "I think, could I have done something more? Could we have done something more?" Student agents see their student interactions as more than just a transaction or transfer of information, but as an opportunity to emotionally invest in their student and create space to become a form of support for their students.

Student agents work to meet students where they're at. They see students as individuals with individual needs and organize their interactions accordingly. IAs often described students as unique, "each one of them has a background and each one of them has a story." Many IAs described different ways in which they addressed students' needs, which often meant remaining flexible in their interactions so that they could incorporate a student's individual background and context into their college life.

> Julie: When I put them in clinical rotation I try to do it the best way I can to facilitate it for them. I have one right now who has 3 kids and she's actually doing her clinical rotation in [city to the south] and the reason we put her in [city to the south] is because she can work a weekend day where she doesn't have to find child care and the two other days she works long days, so she only has to work two days.

Student agents adjust how they interact with students based on the student's needs and individual context. They understand that, "every process is going to be different for every student and all of their backgrounds and their stories, their individual stories matter." Student agents approach their students and their students' backgrounds with respect. They don't see themselves as "saving" students but collaborating with students to get

each student to their individual goal. Several IAs expressed that often times, treating students as individuals meant trying to understand exactly why the student was coming to college.

> Mary: I try to be really open and I respect everyone who sits down with me. What are they trying to accomplish? Because a lot of times they don't want to go to the university. They want to do this applied science degree because they want to do X, Y, Z things and I'm like, "Great, let's figure out how to get you on that path." I appreciate the differences in experiences that we've had and acknowledge that and try to tease out like, "Ok, what do you need from me in my role?" I'm here to really help you follow your academic path.

IAs described how they worked to determine a student's goal and then to figure out how their role could help the student accomplish what they came to college to accomplish. Student agents place the individual goals of each student at the forefront of their interactions with students. This means listening to each student and finding value in their goals and experience, regardless of the student agent's own values or organizational goals.

Student agents meet students where they're at both academically and personally. Many IAs shared personal stories of students they had assisted that had different needs than other students and needs that did not fit within what the college was structured to provide. IAs often spoke broadly about how they addressed the varying needs of different types of students, and then detailed a time they had assisted a specific student.

> Arthur: I think with different students, they have different needs. I think it really does depend on the student that we're working with. If I meet with this student who is first-generation and like they don't know anything, I'll let them know about our free tutoring, I'll let them know about our clubs, try to get them involved on campus, try to see if they can build that sense of belonging. I really think it depends on the student because if I'm working with a nontraditional student who may be older, they're probably not going to want to join any clubs. With that student, I'll just tell them exactly what they need to do.

IAs not only differentiated between first-generation, returning, and older students but a myriad of other demographic descriptors, such as single mother, and other characteristics, like shy or lacking in soft skills. IAs then worked to assist the student where they were academically and personally. Often, IAs worked to determine which students may not have their basic needs fulfilled, and then walked those students through getting assistance.

> Stacy: (Talking about a student with a food shortage) Once we found out it was like, then you set up with [our culinary program] to make sure that they get a meal every day. They're cooking all the time. A lot of the stuff goes to homeless at one point or another. We've done that a couple different times here from people we knew about, but the same gentleman, [Career Services Director] set it up for him to go and get food for his family, to stock his shelves.

Often colleges had at least minimal resources in place to help students with basic needs, but it was IAs who worked to identify students in need of assistance and then made sure those students were connected with the appropriate resources. The for-profit colleges, like the occupational colleges in Rosenbaum et. al. (2007) comparison of community colleges and occupational colleges, are in some ways better designed to meet students where they are at. One IA at a for-profit college stated that, "if you were to ask me, some of the biggest differences in proprietary and community [colleges], those support services would be it," when describing her college's student services department. Students who had a number of absences or weren't doing well in a class were automatically connected with either their program director/coordinator or student services. This structure often made it easier for IAs to determine who might be struggling and who might have an unmet need, including basic needs. IAs could at least then have a conversation with the student about any challenges they were encountering.

A student agent's primary focus is the success of the student, even if a student's needs don't align with institutional goals or policy. Student agents are unafraid to work around rules because, as IAs described, "students are number one and I want to make sure that I'm doing what I can for them, and on occasion a rule just doesn't fit the situation." Doing right by the student is the focus of a student agent's actions and sometimes they have to operate in a gray area. In interviews, many IAs described operating in the gray area or using creative workarounds to help a student.

> Kacey: Like on a policy or our math department's policy that after your prerequisite is over two years old, then you have to retake placement – yeah, I might discretely say [another college] in [another city] doesn't have that same policy so if you want to take math ninety six there - I hate to tell you not to take it here, but there's your workaround.

Workarounds, some discrete and others more explicit, allow the student agent to serve the student's interests without blatantly disregarding policy and rules.

> Beverly: There are always those gray areas where if you can find an angle that helps you advocate for the student, sometimes it works…So there are some workarounds that are still within the ethical policy realm but still gray areas where we could advocate to try to help.

Many IAs shared stories about times they had found a workaround for a policy or worked in the gray area to advocate for a student. IAs acknowledged that policy may be a barrier but explained that if they could "find a way to get the student what they need in spite of the policy and keep my job, I will do that." Student agents navigate the balance between doing what is right for the students and maintaining their position of power within the institution. To do so, they sometimes have to be creative.

Student agents also take a more direct approach when encountering institutional and policy barriers that could potentially interfere with student success. In cases that student agents are not be able to operate in the gray area or find a workaround, they still

"won't just take a no" when it comes to policy barriers. Many IAs shared stories of times they had challenged decision-makers and units with policy-making power to make exceptions or find out, "Why are we doing this? Do we really need to be doing this?" In interviews, IAs also described using their campus network to get exceptions for students.

> Teresa: I'm a huge advocate for the student, so everybody knows that here comes Teresa. What does she want? And it's like this student missed the drop deadline because illness or forgot or didn't know, it's their first time…I really will go and talk to the instructors and administrators, whoever it is, I'm going to talk - I'm not afraid to talk to them. So anything that I can do to make sure that that student is successful and is going to save them time and money, I'm going to help them.

Teresa described using her network at the college to advocate for students when she felt policy was interfering with a student's ability to be successful. A student agent's network can be an integral piece when it comes to advocating for students. If a policy, especially an institutional policy rather than a state or federal policy, interferes with student success, a student agent uses their positional power and network resources to help students. However, not all IAs felt they were in a position of power when it came to policy, especially if it was a state or federal policy. This was a source of frustration for IAs who were trying to advocate for students but felt they couldn't because their "hands are kind of tied." These IAs were critical of the institution and/or policy because of the challenges created for students.

> Stephanie: Like it shouldn't be that hard to come to college. It shouldn't be that hard. The content should be the difficult part of schooling, not the enrollment process…It's like is the goal getting the student to become educated and be a productive member of society and get a career? Or is it like to see how many hoops this student can jump through?

Student agents are not afraid to be critical of the institution in which they work when they see college structure, policy, and processes interfering with student success. They are also

unafraid to call out accreditation, state, and federal policy that interfere with student success.

Student agents not only challenge structures that create barriers for students, but they articulate ways that student experience and student success can be improved. Many IAs expressed that their college had processes or policies that they "would like to see change." Several IAs expressed that they would like to see change specifically in the college's advising practices.

> Bill: Inadvertently, and [this college] is not alone here, we don't make the student experience easy. Just getting into the institution and registering - it should be easier. Every student should have a clear idea of a responsible [college] pivot that they can talk to anytime, ideally like the counselor so that each counselor has an attachment of so many students. They're not going to necessarily be their advisor for the whole thing, but they will be at least somebody that can communicate with them and that doesn't exist. So if you're coming from a non-academic home, you can barely get through the registration process, you run into a problem, you're going to step away.

In the community colleges, some IAs challenged the structure of advising because students weren't connected with one particular person that they could depend on as "their" advisor or counselor. Others challenged advising structures because they didn't get to see the outcomes of their interactions and felt it was difficult to assess the work they were doing. One IA thought a post-advising survey might help "get a better response" because "maybe there was something I didn't really answer with the student." Several IAs in both for-profit and community colleges called for additional support services. When framing students and student success, the limited number of IAs who named the college and college policy as a reason that students were not successful as discussed in the above section on framing students, did so using student agent language. Student agents have a vision for additional services or a better support structure. They

create their vision by listening to students and observing where students repeatedly encounter barriers.

Both for-profit colleges and community colleges had an abundance of IAs who often spoke about students and their interactions with students from a student agent lens. Many described that the reason they entered into their line of work was because they were passionate about supporting students. A student agent's focal point is the success of the student, but they also allow students to define their own goals and work to accommodate those goals, even when institutional structure creates barriers. Student agents challenge the institution to change to meet the needs of the student, as opposed to asking the student to change to fit in the institutional structure. Student agents see their position as student centric, and structure their relationships, interactions, and time accordingly.

Corporate Agent

Those IAs whom I refer to as *corporate agents* work to serve the interests of the college in which they work. Corporate agents aren't anti-student interest, but the interests of the students come second to the priorities of the organization. Corporate agents are focused on factors such as college growth, image of the institution, and positive attributes that highlight the successes of the college. Corporate agents see their institution as a step above other colleges. They work to serve students, but within the confines of institutional structure because they believe that the college has the appropriate processes and resources to best serve their students. Whereas student agents are unafraid to challenge institutional processes and policies, corporate agents spend a majority of their effort focused on what the institution does right. Corporate agents often see the student as

responsible for success, with minimal onus on the college if a student does not succeed. The corporate agent represents a lens that focuses on success in terms of the institution as a whole and not necessarily the success of any one individual student.

Corporate agents firmly believe in the effectiveness of their organization and see their college as infallible. Institutional structure, policy, and processes are seen as optimal and negative outcomes are completely outside of the control of the college. Negative outcomes are the fault of external factors or the student's fault. When corporate agents determine that external factors are the reason a student does not succeed, they also believe that the college has the structure and resources in place to help students navigate any external challenges, focusing onus on the student for not accessing those resources. Some IAs discussed services offered by the college and concluded that these were accessible and appropriate services to boost student success. If services didn't lead to a successful outcome, IAs justified college policy and process.

> Erin: [Speaking about terminating a student who had missed class due to an arrest] They have to go through an appeal process, typical of most schools, and that's part of his path and I can't be the one to decide whether or not it's the right thing. I've been given the tools to decide what's right and I have to act upon that, so I had to terminate him.

Many IAs believed that "it's how bad do you want it, because [this college] will give you every tool." If a student didn't take advantage of the resources offered by the college, that was the fault of the student because they weren't "meeting you halfway on helping them be successful." Even when corporate agents frame external challenges as detrimental to student success, blame for a student stopping out or being terminated is shifted to the student.

In addition to questioning student motivation and effort, IAs placed blame for less than ideal college outcomes on external forces that the IA determined as influencing those outcomes. For example, job placement rates for graduating students in some programs were described as being near impossible to meet for reasons such as "any education that's under 5 months should not be considered something that we're held to," or because students didn't want the types of jobs that were available or were not completing a certification process.

> Bryan: So meeting a 70% placement rate when you can't even get half of your students take the initiative to go out and get certified is impossible.

Corporate agents don't find fault in the college for issues that cause challenges for students or college outcomes. Instead, they see responsibility for change as something external to the college or as the responsibility of the student.

When corporate agents advocate for students, they see themselves doing so as an extension of the institution and never in-spite of the institution. They see their organization as providing them with all the tools they need to meet the needs of the students they serve. Many IAs praised the services the college was able to provide. They saw the extent of the services being offered as more than adequate to support a student's success.

> Ruth: I think because [name of school] is so supportive and so kind, we have, like I said, tutoring that's free to the students. We have computer labs to help you. We have the most gracious, kind, awesome faculty here that will stay off the clock through their lunch to help a student.

The IAs at the for-profit colleges were able to describe extensive services available to students and many described how the entire college was engaged in the success of the student, "it takes a village to graduate a student because we have that student-centered

approach.” However, IAs also shared that they believed that if a student couldn’t succeed despite the college’s resources and student-centered approach, responsibility fell on the student.

> Ruth: When they get to that point, but chances are, we've given them tools, we've given them help, we've given them support, so, "It's on you, I can't want it for you."

Rather than examining an unsuccessful student’s process from all angles, a corporate agent shifts responsibility to the student for not accessing support services whenever a student isn’t able to succeed. A corporate agent does not choose to challenge the institutional structure because the college is seen as operating at an optimal level.

Corporate agents place high importance on the image of their college. Because they believe in the effectiveness of the organization, they are concerned with anyone who might be out in the community misrepresenting the college. A concern with the image of the college is often closely linked with framing the student as a product. Several IAs expressed concern about certain students out on the job market.

> Nicole: I have students that only come once a week, right, and that’s not somebody that I would feel comfortable sending to an employer because that’s our name on the line. How do I know that you’re going to go to work every day and be a good representation of what the school has to offer?

It was predominately at the for-profit colleges that IAs felt that “you’re wearing our name out there, so each one of you represents all of us.” IAs described the image of the college and the students graduating from the college as important to the success of the college. While the image of the college was important for placing graduates in jobs, attention to the image of the college wasn’t isolated to career services. Corporate agents are more concerned with how a student impacts the image of the college rather than any one student’s challenges or success.

Corporate agents see their college as step above other colleges. Corporate agents boast about their college when making comparisons to other colleges. They see their institution as different and better than other similar types of institutions. At the for-profit colleges, it was common to hear that IAs thought their college was better than other for-profit colleges.

> Nikki: I came and I sat in on a class and I was blown away by the amount of knowledge that these students were learning. I was realizing that it was not like Carrington. It was not like Apollo. So instantly I had such a great impression of [this college].

One IA shared that "given my background and experience in education, whether it's community college and other vocational programs, [this college] does it right." IAs at the for-profit colleges commented on the fraudulent practices of other proprietary colleges while discussing how their college was different.

> Patricia: Yeah, it's more costly than a junior college but we also don't get the support from the state that a junior college gets, and we also give extra attention to our students. So I'll hold us up against any public school program proudly because I think we set out to do what we want to do and our school supports it, which I know people who work at other private schools and they make promises they can't keep, even to their faculty.

IAs believed that their college was a "completely different world," and that other proprietary colleges "have done things that have given the industry a bad rap," but "our school doesn't do those kinds of things." IAs at the community colleges also compared their college to others and believed that their college came out ahead in terms of services and people. Corporate agents talk about their college with a sense of pride because they believe their college is better than other comparable colleges.

Corporate agents see their college as highly effective. They place their faith in the organization to do what's right for students and don't think they need to go beyond

what's already in place to advocate for and serve their students. Corporate agents will avoid discussing organizational flaws or opportunities for improvement and express concern when a student has the potential to discredit their positive image. Corporate agents will often boast about the quality of their organization, "Working with [this college], it's such a good company. They're good to their students. They're good to their employees." They believe that when compared to other colleges, they outperform in both student outcomes and integrity.

Employer Agent

Those I refer to as *employer agents* see the institution as predominantly serving employers. In Hentschke (2010), it is suggested that the target market of for-profit colleges is employers. Employer agents are committed to the idea of the employer as the target market and work to train students to meet the needs of employers. Several IAs focused on the idea that students should be preparing themselves for what their future employer expects out of employees and much of the student's classroom experience was focused on what employers would be expecting from them. One IA shared that "there's a lot of emphasis in the classroom as far as the end result of all this is to get a job and this is what employers are looking for." Employer agents focus not only on technical job skills, but on professional behaviors as well.

Employer agents see the students as a product for employers and don't expect that employers should need to do extensive training once students are hired at their post-graduation jobs. The "product" should be ready to meet employer needs at graduation based on their training in the classroom. Several IAs described the technical skills students should have acquired during their programs and explained that employers

expected that students would be proficient in these skills by the time the student was job interviewing.

> John: With technical training, they're going to expect you to be able to do some of the stuff that they know you should know how to do and that's what we got to emphasize, is that you're comfortable with the basic skills when you finish the program and really use them. Culinary students, they practice knife cuts all the time. You should be able to go and work as a prep cook at a restaurant and be able to knock out slicing 50 pounds of potatoes in an hour or something without cutting yourself and without being five different sizes, all that, because you went to school and you trained all the time on it.

Employer agents try to stay connected to the employers they see themselves serving and can produce details about the skills that these employers expect entry-level employees to have. They emphasize to students that students need to have a solid grasp of entry-level technical skills upon graduation.

Employer agents aren't just focused on skills development. Employer agents work to produce what they see as the ideal employee. An ideal employee espouses particular professional behaviors. Many IAs described how students should dress, speak, interact with others, and other behaviors expected on the job. IAs who framed students as a product usually defined their role on campus in terms of how they prepared the student to behave as an employee.

> Laura: There's certain conversations that should not be brought up in the work place as far as your personal life. So it kind of teaches them you need to really focus on who you're talking to and who is around you. There are certain conversations that should not be happening and you need to always be conscious of that. You wouldn't have a conversation with your boss that you would have with your best friend. You wouldn't talk to even a co-worker like you would to a friend outside of work. That's just a huge no, no. So I tell them the same thing applies here. When you're at school and you have conversations with us, you need to keep them on a professional level.

Getting students prepared for their post-graduation job encompassed much more than the skills developed in the classroom. As described in the earlier section of framing students

as a product, it included helping to mold the ideal employee. An employer agent uses their time with students to help the student develop behaviors that will enable them to become the ideal employee.

Employer agents see their relationships with employers as a key part of their position. “We want the jobs by connecting with employers that come to us either early or not to anybody else at all, specific job orders that come to us. Exclusive ones are the best ones.” An employer agent’s role is to develop the ideal employee. While students learn technical skills in the classroom to work toward becoming the ideal employee, they also get coaching from employer agents on the necessary soft skills and attitude. Employer agents work to develop students who will easily transition into an entry level position and will behave in such a way that they don’t “create hassles” or problems for their future employers.

Disciplinary Agent

What I call *disciplinary agents* are IAs who have a strong connection to a specific discipline. They see their position, their interactions with students, and the role of education through the lens of that particular discipline. When a disciplinary agent frames student success, they do so in terms of what would be considered successful within their discipline. A disciplinary agent’s values and goals are much more closely aligned with those of the discipline than the college or any other organizational stakeholder.

Disciplinary agents see their role as initiating students into their particular discipline. This includes teaching students professional behaviors unique to the discipline and instilling students with values that are core to that discipline. Oftentimes, students

who aren't able to succeed are those framed as unable to adopt attitudes or soft skills valued in the discipline. Several IAs described how they shared their discipline specific professional behaviors with students as soon as students arrived on campus.

> Debra: We have an orientation when they come in that focuses on those rules, the expectation of professionalism, what our profession is and that they now are part of our profession. They're not a student, they're part of our profession.

Classroom learning outcomes and profession specific skillsets were only part of the education experience for these IAs. They wanted their students to share their discipline's fundamental values, such as how to interact with others in their field (medical assistants interacting with doctors) or engaging in certain behaviors outside of the classroom and work (culinary students should always be cooking, even at home). For disciplinary agents, students aren't considered successful unless they have adopted the values and behaviors associated with their profession/discipline.

Disciplinary agents don't always agree with college rules or policy that interfere with discipline related behaviors and values. Because the discipline they represent has unique needs and students are developing a particular discipline related skillset, disciplinary agents don't believe that some college policies or rules best fit their students. Many IAs that worked within a specific discipline expressed frustration with policy that they felt wasn't applicable to their students. At times, they felt their students should be an exception to the rules. Other times, they believed policy allowed too much leeway to develop the professional behaviors they expected their students to have.

> Sean: In a book learning world you can go back and read that. In our kitchens, we never repeat. You're not going to see what – you didn't come yesterday and if we made sausage yesterday, that's never going to be repeated for you again. You lose that.

Above, Sean describes his frustration with absence policies that allow too much leeway for students missing class. IAs saw themselves and their students as “a totally different breed” and the application of college-wide rules and policies didn’t always work well with the values and professional behaviors associated with their discipline. Disciplinary agents point out rules and policies that they think are problematic, not for all students, just their students.

Disciplinary agents are concerned with the future clientele of their students and consider those future clientele important for educational purposes. In medical fields, disciplinary agents are concerned with patients. When they discuss outcomes for their programs, they don’t just discuss graduation and job placement, they include the well-being of patients.

> Patricia: Now there are times when we have to let a student go and I don't care if our numbers look bad, we have to let the student go. It's the right thing to do, and I'm not going to put people out there who are not safe in society or to treat someone. If I don't want them treating my family member, then I don't want them out there, because I have to sign and say that they're ready.

In culinary, disciplinary agents discuss satisfied restaurant customers; in theater, the audience and future students of theater education. Disciplinary agents who work in professions that will provide a service to clientele work to ensure their students are best prepared to do so. IAs described the importance of this kind of client-focused thinking in the classroom because a mistake in a field like medical and “you can kill your patient.” Different disciplines emphasized different client related skillsets.

> Nicole: You have to learn how to communicate with the inmates because maybe this inmate is having a bad day, right, and if you can learn how to communicate with this person, that can definitely deescalate the situation better than tazing him or using your baton. You need to learn and use those communication skills because a lot can happen if you learn to communicate with them properly.

IAs stressed that the skills and behaviors students were learning weren't just important for being a good employee (the way an employer agent would), but imperative for serving future clientele. Disciplinary agents see the future clientele of their students as stakeholders of their educational program.

Most IAs that framed students and their position in terms of a discipline were either program coordinators/directors or in career services. Because disciplinary agents frame their experience around a particular field, they see their position through the lens of discipline related values, goals, and clientele. Disciplinary agents differ from employer agents in that they do not see themselves serving the interests of any particular employer, but the field and profession as a whole. They aren't concerned with graduating the ideal employee, but instead, a professional who shares the values of their discipline. Sometimes college policies and procedures may be perceived as interfering with disciplinary goals or the development of their students as professionals. A disciplinary agent prioritizes stakeholders related to their field and that does not always include the college itself or even the student.

Positional Agent

IAs that I call *positional agents* are highly connected to their career and the position they hold at the college. Oftentimes, positional agents see their position as key to the success of the institution and the students. They take pride in holding the title associated with their position, and rather than seeing the individual person as paramount to serving the students, they see the position itself as crucial to connecting with students. Positional agents put time and effort into professional development as means to better serve students, better serve the institution, and grow within their profession.

Positional agents believe that the position they hold is important for the success of the institution. If their position didn't exist, other departments/positions within the college would not be able to function. Positional agents believe their role is the backbone of the institution. A few IAs described how their position was key to the success of the college. They believed that their department carried a large burden for making sure that things didn't fall apart, whether it was accreditation reporting or ensuring successful student outcomes.

> Ellen: Career services, you are the last man out…If the Department of Education is going to say you can have this program, we're going to keep accrediting it, it depends on career services because if we fail to reach those numbers that our accreditation requires and they can take our programs away and so it's a lot of responsibility and I don't think a lot of people even working in the school realize. Your continued job is based off of if I can do my job well. It's career services that can make or break a school in all honesty and I've seen schools go down because of what career services did or didn't do.
>
> Holly: It's very frustrating to hear people walking around going, "I don't know why we need counselors." Well, when you need us you know why you need us, right? Because we are the first people you send those students to. So don't tell me you don't know why we're useful.

IAs often also described that their position was under-appreciated. They voiced that others at the college didn't understand the importance of their role. Positional agents spend time outlining their position's importance within the institution and for the success of the institution.

Positional agents also see their role as crucial to student success. They believe they are integral to the student experience and that students who do not interact with them for whatever reason are missing a vital component of attending college. If students choose not to engage with positional agents because "they don't know the implications of it by not coming and working with us until later," positional agents believe that it can

cause significant hurdles for students. Positional agents often frame students who don't succeed in terms of lack of interaction with an IA, sometimes a result of disinterest or lack of commitment to college and sometimes due to a lack of college-going knowledge. Many IAs discussed the importance of their role in student success. They believed their role was "really central to retention and persistence" and sometimes post-graduation success of the student. This was particularly true among advisors and counselors and in career services. IAs also described the challenge of convincing others how crucial their position was for student success. They described how they felt decision makers were disconnected from the student experience and "if the people who are making the decisions ever took a moment to stop and serve a student, I think they would see things differently." Other IAs had someone advocating for their position.

> Vanessa: [She] has changed some things, she's able to get more staff. She's been great at advocating for what we do and showing how important our job is to administrators that they've really supported her.

Whether IAs felt undervalued or that their value was seen, they expressed that their position was significant for student success and it was important that administrators made decisions based on that. IAs also challenged the structure of the college if they believed it could interfere with their effectiveness. Some IAs felt that the college didn't "really have that infrastructure right now" to work with students the way they thought someone in their position should.

> Mary: And it's hard because as an advisor I really want to do these in-depth conversations with them and make them, you know, take ownership of it and explore like what it is they're really interested in, but currently our infrastructure here is not set up to be conducive to that.

IAs expressed that they felt they could be more effective if the college was designed to better support their role. Because positional agents feel their role is central to student

success, they challenge structures, policies, and procedures that they feel interfere with their ability to do their job.

Positional agents take pride in their role and department. They believe that individuals entering and advancing in the professions related to their position should have adequate education and/or training. Many IAs at both for-profit and community colleges explained how their previous experience was vital to being effective in their position. IAs explained that "a lot of them know our background because we also talk about our background and how our background can help them as well," whether it was career related in career services or the experience of being a first-generation student in advising and student services. A few IAs also expressed frustration regarding others in the same or similar position who lacked the training and/or education.

> Mary: Sometimes you can't really do everything you need to do with the student in 15 minutes. Sometimes it takes half an hour, sometimes it takes longer than that and there's a couple of us who are really experienced advisors and we do that, and then there are other advisors who get mad that we're spending so much time with a student when there are students waiting, but the way that we see it is that we're addressing all of their needs and their issues so that maybe they won't have to come back every single day this week to take care of those things, because that's the pattern we see, but some staff don't have the background or the education level to really understand those kinds of things, or they don't care.

Many IAs believed that the skill level necessary to do their job well took at least some experience or education related to the field. IAs also expressed the importance of clearly defining their position. They felt their position was specialized and that it was crucial to clearly differentiate between their position and others within the college or similar positions at a different college.

> Holly: So I think it's important to identify the difference between counselors and advisors and how much of those transactional things we are expected to do, because for me, the difference between counselors and advisors is that when they

> have an angry or a suicidal or a crying student that they don't want to deal with, they send them to us, because they don't have the skills, the time, the wherewithal, whatever it is, to help with a student whose in emotional distress.

Positional agents view their position as unique and vital to the institution, so it is necessary to differentiate and have the proper training and education in order to fill that vital role.

In addition to believing education and training are necessary to perform well in the position, positional agents also dedicate time and effort to professional/positional development. IAs described ways in which they tried to stay current and up-to-date with professional development in their field. A few IAs shared that they spent any spare time they had working to "improve myself as a pre-professional advisor," or grow in their position. They assisted others with professional development as well.

> Kristy: I'm also doing in-service training with our advisers. I attended an appreciative advising conference this past summer. So myself and another adviser are bringing back the information and we've broken it up into what we call a mini-institute on appreciative advising.

The focus on professional development was particularly present at the community colleges. At one community college site, the Director of Advising encouraged all of her staff to participate in a variety of professional development activities. There were clear ways in which these IAs could grow professionally. IAs at the for-profit colleges worked to develop professionally and grow within their position even though the path to professional development often wasn't as clear cut. Whether there is obvious means to professionally develop or not, positional agents work to grow in their position and participate in professional development opportunities.

Positional agents feel connected to their position and view their role at the college as vital. They see their position as essential to both organizational and student success.

Because of the significance of their position, they believe education and training are necessary and those without proper training may threaten the value of their role or cause substantial problems for college and student success. Positional agents challenge structures and policies that create hurdles for their position and defend inquiries into whether and how their position is effective. They work to develop professionally and have a strong focus on growing within their position and boosting the perception of their position/profession.

Interacting Typologies

Each typology represents a lens to view how IAs function and interact with stakeholders and their environment. However, IAs are more complex than one single typology. IAs serve multiple interests in their daily work and change depending on the context of the interaction or task. IAs traverse a delicate balance between the needs of the various stakeholders their position is designed to serve.

> Erin: There's a lot of consulting that goes on between student services and the registrar because the registrar can be thought of as the person who's like the policy upholder in different respects and then student services is always trying to balance what's right for the student and the policy.

IAs must be aware of how their decision and interactions impact each stakeholder. If an IA is taking the interests of the organization into consideration when serving students, they have to know how individual students will be both negatively and positively impacted. At times, serving stakeholder interests are highly compatible and interests complement each other. For example, if an IA serves the interests of an employer (acting as an employer agent) who then hires additional students from the college in the future, the IA is also serving students. Other times, stakeholder interests are conflicting and

cause issues, such as when an IA honors their profession by engaging in a long, in-depth advising session, but the college is measuring quantity of students seen and an in-depth advising session decreases the number of students an IA can see. As IAs interact with and make decisions about the students they work with, they shift among agent typologies as they consider the importance of various stakeholders and outcomes.

Different typologies will appear depending on an agent's current mood, experience, etc. However, during interviews and when IAs described past interactions with students and experiences, one or two dominate typologies often emerged. Understanding an IA's inclination toward one typology or another can be used as a lens to view how the interests they are serving influence the way they interact with students. The context in which IAs work, the stakeholders they answer to, and their own experience and belief system create typologies that are too layered, complex, and fluid to be measured in any exact way. While typologies draw focus on one stakeholder, the reality is that IAs must focus on multiple and changing stakeholders as they carry out their daily work of serving students.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The perceptions that IAs have of students influence the way they interact with and serve those students. In addition, the work of IAs is often constrained by a number of policies, procedures, and various college stakeholder priorities. However, like Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats, IAs have discretion in their interaction with students. In interviews, many IAs shared that they felt like their interactions with students weren't constrained and that they were free to approach student appointments and conversations in the ways they believed would be most impactful. Similar to interactions between Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats and their clientele, the interactions between IAs and students create space for IAs to serve various interests through their actions, resources, and information sharing. Exploring the lens through which IAs framed students and discussed their approach to policy, procedure, and their daily work, led to the construction of agent typologies based on the interests articulated by IAs during interviews. I extend and contextualize Stanton-Salazar's (2011) definition of institutional agent by including the organization and work context of IAs as influential in IA/student interactions. This adds dimension to his portrayal of IAs acting as conduits in socializing students to the organization, advocates working in the best interests of students and their needs, or as gatekeepers preventing access to important institutional resources. I also extend the definition of institutional agent even further to include the agent typologies of student agent, corporate agent, employer agent, disciplinary agent, and positional agent.

Like the findings from Burton Clark's (1960) case study of a junior college, the structure of the organization in which IAs are employed influences the way in which they interact with students. Both demands for accountability and institutional values are

embedded in the routines and procedures that make up IA/student interactions. The distinct structure and differing missions and priorities of for-profit and community colleges create a difference in the context in which IAs work. The different contexts create space for particular agent typologies to appear in IA daily work. Due to the structure of each sector, some typologies appear predominately at one type of college with fewer instances at the other type of college. In addition, at *both* for-profit and community colleges, IAs use the discretion in their interactions with students to act as policy-makers. IAs determine which students are worthy of extra time and effort and which students are in need of additional information in order to navigate policy. While IAs at the for-profit colleges have smaller caseloads and work within a structure designed to address student deficits, IAs in both sectors experience time constraints and must make decisions about how to use their time. Furthermore, stakeholders of the college play a role in the construction of students as a product and student outcomes with differences appearing according to the position of the IA and where they work. Findings from my dissertation research add nuance to the way that different structures impact IA/student interactions, as well as adding to existing research on institutional agents, particularly institutional agents at for-profit colleges. Findings also contribute by framing IAs as similar to Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats in that they are policy-makers.

Different Structures Impact IA/Student Interaction

Mission and accountability measures directly affect the way an IA frames students and student success. That framing plays out in IA/student interactions and behaviors that IAs expect from students. Burton Clark (1960) described how the structure of an organization and the influences of external and internal pressures can impact

IA/student interactions. Embedded in the position of counselor at Clark's junior college was the role of "cooling out." As would be expected based on finding from Rosenbaum et al. (2007), IA participants from the for-profit and community colleges in my dissertation research were often similarly influenced by the structure of their organization and external pressures. In particular, for-profit colleges had similar structures to Rosenbaum et al.'s (2007) occupational colleges where students had a more formalized meeting schedule when it came to interacting with IAs. I update Clark's findings regarding systemic and organizational influence on processes and roles by adding for-profit colleges and their mission focused on vocational education and employment. Some IAs were in roles that were dependent on relationships with employers or certain professional organizations. The structure of the organization and the responsibility of a role within that structure are highly meaningful for the design of IA/student interactions, particularly when the structure of the organization is designed to move students into entry-level employment directly upon graduation. The relevance of structure on IA/student interactions is evident among IAs who frame students as a product. Burton Clark's advisors "cooled out" students, whereas IAs who framed students as a product worked to develop specific behaviors in students that were related to their view of the ideal employee.

Much of the existing research on advising suggests that IAs impact retention and can help students overcome challenges that lead to departure (King, 1993; Kot 2014; Folsom et al., 2015). Deil-Amen (2011) determines that IAs, faculty/instructors in her research, can intervene when students encounter small hurdles that might otherwise prevent them from continuing their education. My findings reveal how the structure of

for-profits allowed for IA's to have agency in doing such intervention activity. The for-profit colleges in my dissertation research had structures in place to encourage these types of intervening interactions, as discussed above. Unfortunately, the structure and caseload of most personnel at the community colleges prevented IAs from being proactive in an effort to intervene, though both community colleges were exploring methods of doing so. The exception to this was IAs in program coordinator/director roles who had a smaller, more formalized cohort of students. However, even many IAs at the community colleges described how policies that forced students to come to advising by putting a hold on their registration got students in front of an advisor/counselor. My findings support Rosenbaum et al.'s research that occupational colleges have structures in place that better allow IAs to connect with students during key time periods throughout their college experience. However, I had expected that IAs at for-profit colleges would place less responsibility on the student for not succeeding than IAs at community colleges. Instead, onus was focused on the student across both sectors when external variables were not blamed for students not succeeding. Perhaps because the for-profit colleges have structures designed to address student deficits, IAs rarely cite the institution or college structure and policy as a reason that students do not succeed. In addition, exploring structures, such as those included in Rosenbaum et al. (2007), extends Stanton-Salazar's definition of institutional agent by adding the way institutional structure can support or constrain how and why IAs interact with students, particularly when it comes to identifying students who are encountering challenges that could lead to departure.

Working with students within any type of college structure can be complicated and interactions with students are full of nuances. IAs, particularly at the community colleges, recognized the that context in which they must work was complex.

> Anne: At [this college] the counselor role has so many divergent responsibilities. It's like an impossible role. It actually makes me think it's a microcosm of really sort of the role of the community college in the community, there are so many divergent purposes, right? For transfer, for career and technical ed, for personal interest, for workforce, for adult basic ed, you know, it's like can you really be good at all of those things? Can you really be responsive? You can do a sort of reasonable job, but it's an unreasonable expectation.

While the for-profit colleges had more direct goals and missions, many of the positions IAs held demanded that they negotiate a myriad of stakeholder interests and navigate a wide range of responsibilities. Accountability measures were embedded in every position, whether it was reporting placement numbers to an accreditor or tracking the number of students seen for institutional data collection. IAs across sectors have to respond to demands for accountability from supervisors, administrators, and governing bodies, but also must be aware of the impact of their actions and interactions on individual students. However, the structure of how and motivation behind why is different depending on the sector, i.e. the structure in place for contacting students and the outcomes an IA is responsible for in each sector. Their daily work includes navigating organizational complexity for both themselves and the students their positions serve. Having a lens with which to view IA's work that incorporates the various interests that IAs serve and the organization is important because it gives researchers, administrators, and other stakeholders of student success an additional framework to understand the complicated nature of serving students in a college setting. More importantly, it facilitates a more

robust lens for viewing where other interests (organizational, employer, positional, and discipline) interfere with or enable student success.

The Impact of Typology Frequencies

Understanding the frequency with which agent typologies occur in each sector is relevant for exploring how policy impacts on-the-ground employees, for IAs in determining where they may best work according to their own values, and for examining the impact of outside stakeholders on colleges. For-profit and community colleges have different structures, different missions, and different types of positions dedicated to serving students. The occurrence of agent typologies varies by college sector and position, with the positional agent typology more prevalent at community colleges and the employer and corporate agent typologies more prevalent at for-profit colleges. Some stakeholders have more of a presence at one type of college and because of this, some agent typologies are much more prevalent at each college type. For instance, the presence of employer agent language is more prevalent at the for-profit colleges due the importance of employers as stakeholders at this college type (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2004). For-profit college missions often focus on vocational education and tailor programs according to the local labor market (Hentschke, Lechuga, & Tierney, 2010; Hentschke, 2010). Because for-profit colleges not only target employers, but also have much closer ties to employers, it is not surprising that IAs at for-profit colleges often discuss the interests of employers when talking about student success. In addition, for-profit colleges have reporting obligations when it comes to job placement that make it necessary to maintain relationships with employers. All of this makes it highly probably that IAs at for-profit colleges would view the interests of employers as priority.

IAs at for-profit colleges were also much more likely to frame their students, interactions, and descriptions of the institution using corporate agent language. While qualities of the corporate agent appeared in community college IA interviews, it was less frequent and less evident. For-profit colleges have spent many years under the microscope for fraudulent practices and promising students employment outcomes that were not feasible (Blumenstyle, 2011; Blumenstyle, 2012; Golden, 2010; Herbert & Hustad, 2013; Kirkham, 2011; Kutz, 2010; United States Congress. Senate Committee on Health et al., 2012). Accountability measure have increased over time to include close monitoring of job placement data through gainful employment regulation. The attention to for-profit college practices by the government, accreditors, and the public could potentially cause IAs to approach their work with a corporate agent lens. They may feel they need to defend their organization by comparing their college to others that have been less successful, which many participants did in their interviews. In addition, the focus on compliance at for-profit colleges might make IAs more likely to stick to rules and have concerns about challenging policy. IAs at the for-profit colleges often discussed remaining in compliance with a wide range of accountability bodies. In other words, they act like a corporate agent when addressing policy to ensure they are in compliance, particularly when it comes to federal financial aid and gainful employment regulations. As Lipsky (2010) describes, it is challenging to implement accountability measures that limit discretion, however, for-profit colleges, which have increased accountability, have a larger number of corporate agents working to remain in compliance with institutional, federal, and accrediting policy.

The variety of accountability measures that were relevant for different positions shifted which stakeholder interests needed to be served. In career services, IAs had to be connected to employers to do their job and so employer agent language was much more common than in other positions. However, not every IA working in career services framed their position and students with an employer agent lens. In addition, disciplinary agent qualities appeared mostly in interviews with program coordinators/directors and occasionally with IAs in career services who worked with specific programs. The agent typology qualities that appeared most often at both for-profit and community colleges and in every type of IA role was the student agent. The student agent relates most closely to Stanton-Salazar's (2011) institutional agent in the way that they assist students with navigation of the institution in order to help students succeed. IAs acting as student agents most closely resembled Stanton-Salazar's institutional agents despite structural differences across sectors.

In addition to exploring how structure impacts frequency of agent typologies, findings elaborate on Davidson's (2016) research on student affairs professionals transitioning between sectors. Davidson found that when student affairs professionals transition from one college sector to another, understanding the context of the daily work of the new sector is important for a successful transition. Review of agent typologies extends the understanding of the context in which these professionals work. For example, moving from a non-profit college counseling role to a for-profit college career services role is a shift in sector mission and positional stakeholders. Based on Davidson's (2016) work and the addition of agent typologies, student services personnel can better manage

their transition by expecting a probable shift in the frequency of different agent typologies when transitioning from one sector to another.

IAs as Policy-Makers

Similar to Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats, IAs used the discretion in their interactions to act as policy-makers. While an IA's job is to enforce organizational policy by communicating and monitoring expectations to students, IAs often have the opportunity to work in the "gray area" when assisting students. IAs at for-profit colleges discussed tracking of student outcomes and student interactions in-depth and while they had discretion in their interactions with students, IAs were responsible for recording each interaction. IAs worked in the "gray area" and worked within their chain of command to help socialize students to institutional norms like Stanton-Salazar's (2011) institutional agents. IAs also worked to socialize students to external stakeholder norms. In addition, IAs are constrained by lack of resources, mainly time, and cannot prioritize every individual student's needs. IAs used the discretion in their interactions to decide who to spend more time with and who they would help navigate the "gray area." Furthermore, by framing students, external factors, and state/federal/accreditation policy as responsible for the lack of student success, IAs maintain their advocate identity when, for whatever reason, they are not able to help students experiencing challenges.

IAs are hired into their position to accomplish certain outcomes and perform particular tasks which are often related to enforcing institutional, federal, or accreditation policy and socializing students to institutional norms. Their job duties are to enact and enforce institutional policy through advising students on certain behaviors expected of students and reinforcing those behaviors during IA/student interactions. For example, if a

for-profit college expects their students to dress "professionally," an IA's job includes describing that expectation, communicating consequences if that expectation is not met, and then enforcing consequences for students who do not abide by policy. While IAs described how they assisted students, it was within the confines of their position: communicating and then enforcing institutional policy while occasionally working with students to navigate around policy if they seemed to be an exception to the policy. This is because much of a student services personnel's work is designed around communicating and enforcing institutional policy and the college's expectations for students. IAs in many of the roles at for-profit colleges had to track and document their interactions with students and all policy exceptions were run through a chain of command, sometimes all the way up to the college President. IAs wanted to ensure that if there was ever an issue with a decision they made regarding a policy exception, they were protected from punitive consequences because they had approval from those in supervisory or leadership positions. IAs were hesitant to participate in activities that could threaten their job security in both sectors. In addition, many IAs at for-profit colleges were in roles where gainful employment regulation and media attention on for-profit colleges meant closely following policy to remain in compliance. Unlike Luca's (2010) admissions personnel who continued to pursue student recruitment outcomes more aligned with their values despite their college's strategic shift, IAs did not share examples of explicitly disregarding policy or processes linked to outcomes. Instead, IAs worked to operate in the "gray area" or went through their chain of command. When IAs worked with students to explore the "gray area," they were also socializing students to institutional, external stakeholder, and policy norms. Stanton-Salazar's (2011) institutional agents work to

socialize students to institutional norms. I bring nuance to Stanton-Salazar's definition of institutional agents by adding socialization of external stakeholder norms, found most overtly in IA/student interactions of corporate, disciplinary, and employer agents, such as a disciplinary agent working for successful student outcomes more closely related to their disciplinary values.

IAs act as policy-makers by choosing how to spend their time, who to spend their time with, and by determining when to help students navigate the "gray area. IAs are restricted by limited resources, especially their most valuable resource, their time. In order for an IA to help a student navigate the "gray area" of policy, they must dedicate time to that particular student. IAs process a large number of students in their daily work and in interviews lamented not being able to spend more time with students (at the community colleges) or felt as if they were constantly "putting out fires" (at the for-profit colleges). For the large number of students IAs are not able to spend additional time assisting with the navigation of bureaucratic policy, IAs must simply enforce policy. However, IAs become policy-makers when they choose which students they will spend additional time with and which students to share information with regarding policy "gray area." Often, time constraints at community colleges prevent IAs from spending the necessary time with students who encounter challenges. As Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person's (2007) work would predict, for-profit college IAs in many roles were more easily able to take a proactive approach and seek out students who displayed signs of departure, but those in student services coordinator roles who were responsible for helping to identify and contact students who were in danger of leaving college often described their daily work in terms of non-stop interruptions. Because of non-stop

interruptions and more students than an IA has time for, IAs at both for-profit and community colleges act as policy-makers when they determine who is deserving of extra time and certain information. The ability to act as policy-makers becomes problematic when minoritized students are excluded from the students receiving additional time and information. The IAs included in interviews for my dissertation research where predominately white. While participants may not be representative of employees at each college, it is worth noting that the students attending these colleges ranged from approximately 38% white to 54% white at the various campuses. Research has explored negative outcomes related to racial stereotyping and implicit bias in the classroom (Taylor & Walton, 2011; Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby-Senghor, 2016). A majority white staff of student services personnel working as policy-makers has the potential to negatively impact the large percentage of minoritized students attending these institutions.

Much like Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats, the structure of the organization and position of an IA create constraints for IAs when attempting to advocate for students. Parallel to Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats, IAs describe the ways in which they justify their actions and maintain their advocate identity. In this way, my findings support the same dynamic described by Lipsky (2010) in which street-level bureaucrats develop behaviors and reasoning to support their actions when they are not able to serve clientele the way they had imagined. IAs carry with them assumptions about who is deserving of their time and effort as well as assumptions about what it looks like when a student puts effort into their educational experience. For example, IAs discuss supporting students who have "that want," framing those who don't seek out their help as

not having the desire to succeed. IAs are able to determine what "that want" looks like based on their own assumptions related to merit and student success. Some IAs describe spending more time with those who demonstrate desire, as they are not able to spend equal amounts of time with each student, concentrating time and effort on a select few. In addition, IAs often identified students as hindering their own success, rather than identifying any organizational short-comings. IAs have discretion in their individual interactions with students, and similar to Lipky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats, structural constraints and managerial controls, such as incentives and sanctions, or accountability measures constrain how IAs can do their job. IAs apply the discretion in their interactions by determining who is worthy of their time, when to act as advocates for students, and when to claim that their "hands are tied."

External Stakeholders, Agent Typologies, and Student Outcomes

External stakeholders play a role in the way that IAs frame students and student success. The way that an IA determines whether a student outcome is successful is based upon stakeholders that influence their agent typology. The motives and values of external stakeholders, along with the priorities of the institution, shape the way that IAs interact with students. For example, institutional pressure and programmatic advisory boards may influence IAs to frame their students as a product at a for-profit college, whereas membership in a professional advising/counseling organization may influence IAs at a community college to view their role and students differently. In addition, as discussed above, mission plays a role in how IAs view their position and whose interests they serve. This is an extension of Kinser's (2006b) findings that mission plays a role in the structure and function of student affairs at for-profit colleges. However, framing students as a

product due to external stakeholders who are considered the target market of for-profit colleges is different from Kinser's (2006b) assertion of students as customer and has meaning for how agent typologies interact with students. The role of external stakeholders and how they influence the frequency of agent typologies and how IAs frame students, can impact student success and student outcomes in both positive and negative ways.

I had predicted that serving various interests was more likely to be complementary at for-profit colleges than community colleges based on the structure of for-profit colleges (Rosenbaum et al., 2007) and early research on community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994). External stakeholder interests aren't necessarily more compatible with student interests at for-profit colleges than they are at community colleges. Though the types of interests that influence interactions vary in frequency between sectors and positions, each agent typology and the associated interests they serve have the potential to be both beneficial and problematic for serving students. While some typologies have obvious benefits or problems, others create more ambiguous hurdles and less apparent benefits. Interview data can provide some clues as to how typologies can be beneficial or problematic. IAs' narratives included stories of instances where their actions had been particularly beneficial for student success. They also shared instances when successful outcomes were not achieved and articulated why they believed a student or group of students did not meet their goals. In these cases, IA narratives don't represent evidence of agent typology benefits and issues, but a potential lens for viewing the interactions leading to various student outcomes.

Student agents center their focus on a student and collaborate with each student to work toward success through building trust, investing in the student, challenging the institution when necessary, and putting the student first in terms of time and decision making. Student agents help students meet their individual goals and navigate complex systems. In addition, as described by Deil-Amen (2011), student agents help students overcome both external and bureaucratic hurdles to personal success and graduation. However, occasionally a focus on the needs of an individual student could potentially be detrimental to the institution and become harmful for large groups of students. Much like the advisor Holland (2015) describes in her research, IAs described spending time building trust with their students. In addition, IAs discussed challenging institutional barriers and finding ways to meet students where they were at. Many also described limited time and resources. In instances where a student agent acts on behalf of one student, they are unavailable to other students and could leave many students with unmet needs. In addition, student agents must be explored through a lens that embodies both IAs and students. If a student agent only acts as such on behalf of a privileged group, they are further minoritizing and underserving others. In other words, student agents work as agents for some students while creating additional hurdles for others.

Corporate agents can be beneficial for student success and graduation if their college's structure is set-up to support students. If a corporate agent works for a college that enrolls, educates, and graduates students with integrity and an active mission to support equity, they will work within their college's structure to facilitate student success. However, college policy and procedure must help students who encounter barriers to success, specifically barriers caused by inequity. Otherwise, corporate agents will

overlook or ignore harmful policy because they refuse to question their college's operational processes. Corporate agents can also miss opportunities to serve students because they blame the student for failure and don't scrutinize the institution. If students encounter barriers that the institution is not designed to help students overcome, corporate agents place responsibility on the student and will not take the opportunity to grow services or remove detrimental policy. In cases like these, another type of agent might find a creative way to grow support services, whereas a corporate agent supports the status quo.

Employer agents are particularly beneficial for vocational programs because their relationships with employers support student job placement goals. These types of relationships are necessary for for-profit college programs (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2004). Oftentimes, students enroll in vocational programs with the sole goal of a job in that vocation upon graduation, and employer agents are a key support for that goal. Not only do employer agents build relationships with employers that help students get hired, they also help students get jobs by assisting students in the development of the necessary professional tools and soft skills that employers are looking for. However, descriptions of the ideal employee shared by IAs in interviews could potentially be harmful for students. In shaping the ideal employee or product, IAs asked that students not challenge or question authority and do exactly as they were told. Skills that were not developed when shaping the ideal employee included leadership skills and discussions that would encourage students to challenge systems of inequity. This is problematic for institutions that predominately enroll low-income and minoritized students. By reinforcing particular

behaviors in the workplace, employer agents could be encouraging students to remain in low-level positions.

Disciplinary agents are beneficial for acclimating students to the values and practices within a particular discipline. Like the beneficial activities of employer agents, disciplinary agents help students prepare for their post-graduation job by assisting in the development of professional behaviors related to their discipline. Disciplinary agents are key in helping students acquire the tools that will enable students to be successful in their discipline. However, disciplinary agents view students and their institution through a narrow lens. They can be so focused on discipline related values that they don't always see students and education holistically. This narrow view is a missed opportunity to serve students in creative and innovative ways and creates space to underserve students who have already experienced resource gaps. In addition, students who don't share discipline related values are viewed as unsuccessful. This is another missed opportunity to assist students who may not succeed in one particular discipline but have the potential to succeed as a student in a different discipline.

Positional agents are dedicated to professional growth. Because of this commitment to growth in their field, they are often knowledgeable about the most up-to-date practices related to their position and field. For advisors and counselors, this can include new directions for equitable practices in retention and graduation interventions. Positional agents engage in best practices that have the potential to have real results for student success. Positional agents also place a high value on training and experience. IAs participating in this study were at times highly critical of those who had education and experience different from their own. A positional agent's view of the education and

experience it takes to do their job adequately may cause them to devalue education and experiences that don't mirror their own. This is a missed opportunity for exploring creative ways to boost student success and better serve diverse student populations.

Conclusion

My research was designed to explore the process of how IAs navigate the complexity of their position and organizational context. I looked at both how IAs frame the students they work with and whose interests IAs see themselves serving in their daily work. Using Stanton-Salazar's (2011) definition of institutional agents and Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats as a framework, I explored how IAs frame students as a way to understand how they view the complexity of their daily work and whose interests they serve. I had expected that the daily work of IAs was complicated and dependent on the sector (for-profit or community college) in which they work. In addition, I had expected that the way IAs framed responsibility for student success or barriers to student success would also be dependent on the sector in which they work. Furthermore, I had expected that at times, serving the interests of the institution and the interests of students would be reliant upon each other and other times, serving diverse interests would be incompatible.

The way that an IA frames students influences their interactions with students. An IA's framing of students can impact an IA's effort when assisting students and how an IA connects students to resources. The themes related to framing students that emerged in IA narratives fell into the broad categories of IA/student interactions, why students succeed (or don't succeed), and framing students as product. An IA's framing of a particular student influenced student/IA interactions. Many IAs described the students that they

were willing to put extra time and effort into helping as having the "desire" to succeed. IAs had the discretion to decide what the desire to succeed looked like and who had that desire. IAs also determined that a student might not succeed based on external variables, such as work or family. Some IAs expressed that it was up to the student to resolve challenges stemming from external variables, while others saw it as the responsibility of the college to provide additional resources to students struggling with these types of challenges. IAs discussed the complicated nature of student success and named a number of variables that could present barriers for students. However, it was rare that IAs described institutional barriers as responsible for a student not succeeding. Several IAs also framed students as a product of the college. In this framing, students were supposed to learn particular behaviors that would make the ideal employee for employers who hired students post-graduation. The various ways in which IAs framed students was insightful for exploring whose interests IAs saw themselves serving in their daily work.

By exploring the way that IAs frame students and their interaction with students, I was able to develop what I call agent typologies. IAs serve particular interests through their interactions, decisions, and activities and typologies provide a lens for viewing how an IA serves a specific stakeholder's interests. Five different agent typologies, *student, corporate, employer, disciplinary,* and *positional*, were described in my findings. However, I did not draw perfect parallels between an IA's framing of students and typologies because of the complexity of an IA's work. In addition, no one IA is exactly one typology, but instead, a nuanced combination of typologies. As IAs work with students, typologies can complement each other but can also conflict. How an IA prioritizes the various interest they serve when those interests conflict is insightful for

viewing an IA's more dominant typology. However, IAs cannot be labeled as a particular typology because typologies emerge and disappear with context and time. Furthermore, some typologies appear more often at one type of college or in one type of role because the structure of the college in which an IA works impacts the way that IAs frame and interact with students.

The first typology from my findings is the student agent. A student agent uses their resources and network to advocate for students, works to build trusting relationships with their students, emotionally invests in their students, puts the students first, and meets their students where they are at. Student agents continually challenge policy and structure when it interferes with student success. Corporate agents are focused on serving the interests of the college in which they work. Corporate agents talk about and focus their daily work on college growth, image of the institution, and positive attributes that highlight the successes of the college. They also see their institution as operating with integrity and as a step above others. Therefore, corporate agents see no reason to work outside of institutional boundaries, policy, or procedures to best serve students. An employer agent sees the institution as firstly serving employers and sees their relationships with employers as an important part of their position. Employer agents are focused on creating student behaviors that will lead to the student becoming the ideal employee for the employers that the college serves. Disciplinary agents see their position and their interactions with students through the lens of their discipline/profession. In addition, a disciplinary agent's goals and definition of student success are more closely aligned with their discipline than the college where they work. Positional agents view their role at the college as vital and see their position as key to organizational and student

success. Rather than viewing the individual as important in serving students, they see the position itself as essential. They also work to develop professionally in order to better serve stakeholders. It is key to understand that regardless of agent typology, IAs are still employees who depend on the success of the organization in which they work and continue to act as policy enforcers in their daily work.

My contribution to previous work on IAs is to extend how we define IAs by including the organization and work context as not neutral, but influential in how student services personnel can work as institutional agents. In exploring how IAs framed students and their approach to policy, procedure, and their daily work, I extended and contextualized the lens for viewing IA's daily work by developing and describing the agent typologies *student agent, corporate agent, employer agent, disciplinary agent,* and *positional agent*. Lipsky's (2010) framing of street-level bureaucrats widens the lens for viewing IAs so that we can view their interactions with students in terms of factors that influence and constrain how they serve students. Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucrats are framed as creating policy through their discretionary interactions. While IAs framing of students often emphasizes their role as stewards of their organization's values and priorities, IAs use the discretion in their interactions with students to make policy by determining who is deserving of their time and effort. In addition, the different structure and context of for-profit and community colleges cause the frequency of agent typology to vary by institution type and play a role in how IAs frame students, especially in terms of framing students as a product and framing student outcomes. It would benefit higher education scholarship if student services personnel and administrators were no longer viewed as one dimensional, there to help students, but instead, in terms of the role they

play in the institution and larger state/federal mandates, even when it works against the student.

Implications for Research and Practice

There are various implications for practice and pathways for research using agent typologies. The development of agent typologies in this research is far from exhaustive. In my dissertation research findings, IAs' identities were not included. IA identities and how that identity relates to the students they serve is an important element of an IA/student interaction. This could be particularly informative for learning about IAs as student agents. How IAs connect to students, frame student success, and conceptualize responsibility for student success is all related to an IA's personal context, including their identity and demographic data. Therefore, an IA's personal context, not just external context, is imperative for a deeper understanding of how agency influences student success in college. IA identity and demographic data can lead to a better understanding of IA daily work and fuller agent typology descriptions.

Related to IA personal context, are IA views of serving traditionally underserved versus privileged populations. Assuming resource and time constraints, IAs are not able to dedicate the same amount of time to each student if they are acting as a student agent. Are there particular underserved or privileged populations that IAs target when acting as student agents? IAs could be working to serve minoritized students or they could use their agency to assist students who have already been given the tools to be successful and for whom existing structures are designed to serve. Connecting identity and agency to understand how IAs serve particular populations of students aligns with Stanton-Salazar's (2011) work on empowerment agents, agents who don't just help students acclimate to

school culture, but help students develop a critical lens for viewing that culture. If IAs are acting as student agents, it is important to understand who they are using their agency to help and the implications for underserved and minoritized students.

In addition to understanding who student agents impact, research could explore how students respond to different agent typologies. Do students see one typology as more helpful/impactful than others? Understanding how students respond to different agent typologies is beneficial for student success interventions, particularly if students respond better to a specific agent typology in different cases and contexts. For example, students would most likely respond best to an employer agent in career services, but are there other contexts where an employer agent lens would be beneficial for student success? Student voices and experiences are missing in the development of agent typologies and should be explored for a more thorough understanding of how agent typologies and students interact.

Another research area important for the understanding of agent typologies is further exploration of when and why certain agent typologies occur. The structure of an institution and context of an IA's position could make it more probable that they will act and interact using a certain typology lens. Further research could help determine why IAs develop an orientation toward one or more agent typologies. In addition, there is much room to learn more about patterns of agent typologies. Is it more common for certain combinations of typologies to occur together? For example, is an employer agent more likely to also be a corporate agent? Understanding patterns of agent typology combinations and why agents develop specific typology orientations can provide more insight into how IAs serve students.

Agent typologies have the potential to benefit practice in multiple ways. If administrators and those working in student services understand the way that IAs view stakeholders and whose interests IAs prioritize, then they can create and frame student success interventions in ways that will best enable IAs to assist students. In other words, administrators and student services departments can develop interventions that IAs buy into and that compliment IA values and priorities. Even personnel in positions with little power to design interventions or change college structure can reframe existing student success initiatives to encourage IA endorsement. For example, framing student success initiatives in terms of patient benefits could help produce buy-in from disciplinary agents in the medical field. Asking positional agents to assess student outcomes of a new intervention and then encouraging positional agents to present that data at a professional conference could motivate them to invest in the new intervention. Understanding the lens through which IAs view their daily work provides a tool for encouraging IA investment in student success interventions and initiatives.

Higher education scholars and administrators would benefit from viewing and exploring student services personnel as multi-dimensional. While student services personnel employ roles that are assumed to serve students, they are subject to a number of accountability measures and stakeholder obligations that don't always serve student success or do so in a more complicated way. Researches and administrators must pay attention to policy and structure of institutions, including stakeholders outside of the institution that place demands on those positions designed to serve students. While IAs have the potential to impact the success of individual students, they must do so within policy constraints. Ultimately, IAs also must serve the institution in which they work so

that they are able to continue their employment and so policy must be examined to understand the constraints under which IAs serve students.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviews were semi-structured. Below are interview questions, which include key topics to be explored during interviews. Often during interviews, participants were asked to explore topics in further depth or to share a story when their descriptions were more abstract.

1. What has been your professional experience up until this position?
2. What are students like when they get here?
3. How are students different when they leave (graduate)?
4. Based on your experience, what do students need most to be successful in school?
5. What does a successful student look like? What is their process?
6. What does an unsuccessful student look like? What is their process?
7. Are there students who can't succeed here? What, if any, are their unique behaviors/characteristics?
8. How do you convey and reinforce your expectations/the colleges expectations of students when they get here?
9. How has your attitude toward and perception of students changed since you first started your position?
10. What students have you had the largest impact on?
11. What kinds of things do you have in common with your students? What are some differences?
12. Take me through your daily work, how is your day structured, what happens throughout the day?
13. Are their policies/structure that keep you from developing relationships with your students?
14. Those that help you develop relationships?
15. What are some of the policies, rules, routines, and norms in place here that help you assist struggling students?
16. What about those that create more challenges for struggling students?
17. What are some policies, rules, norms, and routines that you like/dislike?

18. What do you do when your workload becomes too large or you don't have the appropriate resources? What is prioritized? Deprioritized?
19. Do you get to see the outcomes of your work? What is that like for you?
20. How much freedom or discretion do you have in your position?
21. Are there times when policy or rules were constricting or detrimental and you worked outside or against them?
22. Are there students you go the extra mile for or dedicate more time to? Who are these students?
23. What parts of your job are tracked?
24. How do measures/outcome expectations impact your quality of service?
25. Is there anything else that you feel like I should know about you, your position, this college?

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